NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered at Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

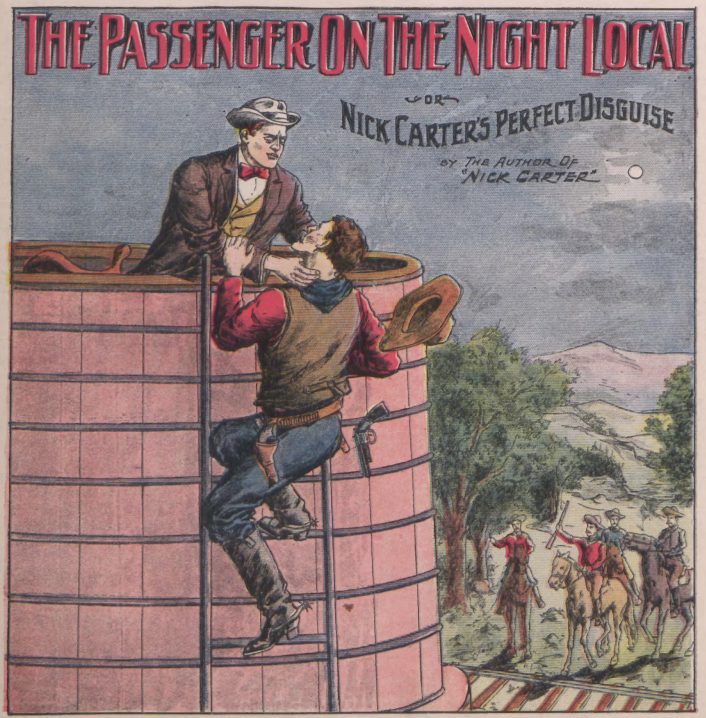
No. 525 NEW YORK, JANUARY 19, 1907. Price, Five Cents

THE PASSENGER ON THE NIGHT LOCAL

OR

NICK CARTER'S PERFECT DISGUISE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



At the instant when the head and shoulders of the fellow were suddenly thrust into Nick Carter's face, the detective's hands shot out and closed on the throat of the outlaw like a vise.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 525. NEW YORK, January 19, 1907. Price Five Cents.

The Passenger On the Night Local;

Pub. Jan. 19, 1907.
Ret. Mch. 27, 1920.

OR,

NICK CARTER'S PERFECT DISGUISE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSENGER ON THE NIGHT LOCAL.

Nick Carter was seated in the rear of the smoking-car when the train pulled up at a watering-tank and the locomotive wheezed dismally, like the breathing of a tired monster, while the valves were opened and the boilers were replenished.

Darkness had fallen; that is, the sun had gone down and twilight had disappeared. The night, however, was not a dark one, for the young moon, half-way toward the full, was already near the zenith; and the air being wonderfully clear, objects were plainly discernible at a considerable distance across the sage-brush-covered landscape.

During five minutes previous to the stopping of the train Nick Carter had been interested in some moving figures that had attracted his attention outside.

It should be explained that the car in which he was seated was very imperfectly lighted; also that the detective, for reasons of his own, had been rather closely studying the character and topography of the country around him since mid-afternoon; and, also, that it was his present intention to leave the train at the station next beyond this one. The reasons for all this will presently appear.

But his interest in the surrounding country had not subsided with the setting of the sun, and he had shaded his eyes with his hands and continued to peer through the windows upon the moonlighted landscape, even after the smoky lamps in the car were lighted.

The station where the train stopped for water was called Caliper; and the one next beyond, where it was the detective's intention to alight, was called Whackup.

The moving figures to which Nick's attention had been attracted consisted of five horsemen, who had appeared suddenly upon the crest of a ridge, five minutes before the cars came to a stop.

He had happened to have his eyes fixed directly upon the spot where they appeared at the precise instant when they rode into view. Something about the action of these five horsemen appeared suspicious in Nick's eyes, so that he found himself muttering:

"If I did not know that this is just a local that never carried an express package, I should say that those fellows were meditating a hold-up; but as it is, perhaps they are planning an ambuscade."

"What is it for I wonder? Plainly it is intended for somebody who is aboard this train and who expects to leave it at this station."

He withdrew his eyes from the window and gazed with more interest than he had heretofore shown upon his fellow passengers.

Nick finished counting them just as the train came to a stop; and he noticed that of the fourteen he counted, in addition to himself, not one seemed to be interested in the stopping of the cars; that is, there did not appear to be one among them who intended to alight.

But just as Nick had made up his mind that the men he had seen across the sage-brush-covered country were looking for somebody from one of the other cars—there were two others beside the smoker—a young man who occupied the fifth seat in front of him rose slowly to his feet, stretched himself and yawned, and then with an alert look in his eyes which gave the lie to his demonstration of sleepiness, stepped quickly toward the door near where the detective was seated.

In the two seconds which elapsed before the stranger reached the seat where Nick was seated, the detective had time to see that he was a young man of striking appearance, with a strong, handsome face, athletic figure, and an alert, self-reliant manner, which is rare even in that country; and Nick, who is always as quick in his conclusions about the character of men as he is in other things, put out one hand and stopped him.

"Pardon me, stranger," he said slowly, when the other halted in very evident surprise. "I don't care to appear to butt in upon something that does not concern me, but may I ask if it is your intention to leave the train at this station?"

The young man fixed one keen, searching glance upon Nick Carter's face before he replied, and he was evidently satisfied by what he saw, for he smiled rather whimsically as he replied:

"Such was my intention; yes, sir. May I inquire as to what manner it concerns you?"

"Well," said Nick, smiling back at him, "I asked the question because it occurred to me that if you did intend to leave the train here you ought to be told that there are five men hovering around this station on horseback and acting as though they intended waylaying some pilgrim, which might be yourself."

The expression of the young man's face changed while Nick was speaking. The smile was gone from it now. His eyes were flashing and his nostrils had dilated. Then he smiled again.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "We have about three minutes more before the train will move on. Do you mind telling me exactly what you saw out there?"

"Not at all," replied Nick; and he described exactly what he had seen.

"This is rather a lonely station, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes. There is rarely a soul here at all."

"And I expect, if you should leave the train now, that you would be utterly alone the moment the cars pulled out; eh?"

"Yes; although——"

"Oh, I expect I could guess what you are going to say. All the same, five against one is rather long odds, even if that one isn't exactly afraid. Do you happen to have a horse out there, somewhere?"

"'Somewhere' about expresses it, sir. I've got a horse, and he won't be very far away from here now; all the same, it might take me all of half an hour to find him. He would come to me the instant he heard me whistle—but he might not be near enough to hear it at once."

"Now, if you happened to have *two* horses, stranger," said Nick meditatively. He stopped, then, and asked: "How far is it from here to Whackup?"

"Thirty miles, as the crow flies. Are you thinking of leaving the train there?"

"Yes; but I could get off with you here just as well, if I could buy or borrow a horse in this neighborhood. Now——"

But there was no time to finish what the detective was about to say, for at that moment the engineer pulled the whistle to denote that he was prepared to move on, and the young stranger, who still stood in the aisle beside Nick Carter's seat, touched his Stetson hat and said:

"There is the signal. I must leave you. Good-by, and much obliged."

"Why not go to Whackup?" asked Nick, half-rising from his seat.

But the young man only smiled back at him as he hastened to the door and passed out upon the platform where Nick saw him swing himself to the ground with that same careless grace which was his most attractive characteristic.

Instantly Nick Carter's resolution was taken.

He seized the grip that rested on the seat beside him, and hastened to the door; and in another moment he also had swung off the train, twenty feet beyond the spot where the handsome young stranger had alighted.

It happened that the two were well in the shadow of the huge water-tank, and it was at once evident to the detective that where they stood they could not be seen by the five men who were concealed along the trail waiting for them; and then, as Nick turned to address a remark to the young stranger, he discovered that the latter was standing with his right hand resting easily upon his hip, but that the hand held a Smith & Wesson .44 with the

muzzle elevated so that if the trigger were pulled it would send a bullet directly through the detective's heart.

"I don't know you at all, sir," the young man said, "and I will admit quite frankly that I believe you to be all right; but before we lock arms in friendship, considering all that you have said to me, I think it as well that we should understand each other."

"Quite right," replied the detective. "I don't know you, either. However, as I intended to leave the train at the next station, and as my ultimate destination is located somewhere between this station and that one—*and*, as you strike me as being too fine a young man to get himself unnecessarily riddled with bullets, I just thought I'd step off and keep you company. Five to two is a little better proposition for the weak side than five to one."

"All the same, sir, that doesn't tell me who you are."

"No. I realize that; and if I should tell you, you probably wouldn't know any better who I am than you do now. Do you think that by any chance that whistle of yours could be persuaded to bring *two* horses instead of one?"

"I must insist, sir——"

Nick Carter interrupted his companion.

"Pssst!" he hissed. "Your friends are on the move. Take my advice and draw a little deeper into this shadow. We can settle this introduction business later on."

Across the moonlit plain toward the rocks they could now see the figures of four men plainly outlined against the sky. It was evident that they were in doubt whether their expected quarry had left the train or not, but also that they were determined upon finding out.

The two who were waiting in the shadow of the tank heard a shrill whistle from one of them, and it was presently followed by the appearance of the fifth man, near them, with the horses; and Nick turned to his companion and remarked coolly:

"Those fellows don't know that there are two men here, and they are not certain that there is even one. I suppose, stranger, that you have a reasonably good idea as to who they are; eh?"

"Yes. The only thing that is puzzling me at just this moment is, who *you* are," was the cool reply.

"Look at them now," said the detective, without noticing this remark. "They have made a very shrewd guess that you are hiding in the shadow of this tank and they are going to surround it. Two are riding off to the left, and two to the right. It looks to me as if there might be some warm work around here presently."

And as he ceased speaking the sharp crack of a revolver echoed across the plain, and a bullet plunged into the planking of the tank exactly between them, where they stood.

CHAPTER II.

TWO HEROES KNOW EACH OTHER.

Neither Nick Carter nor his companion moved from their positions by so much as the width of a hair when the bullet sped between them, and embedded itself in the framework of the tank, and neither made any remark about the incident, for it was evident to both that the shot had been sent in merely as a feeler, to discover by that means, if possible, if any one were lurking in the shadow. It was merely an incident that the bullet had come so close to them.

And now the four men were riding toward the positions they had evidently elected to take in order that they might surround the tank, for presently one halted and then another, until they were grouped like the five points of a star, entirely surrounding the object of their suspicions.

"It would be dead easy for us to pick them off," said Nick, after a moment. "Too easy, in fact. I don't like to shoot a man like that."

"Nor I," replied the stranger. "If Loco doesn't come too close, we might as well let him go."

"Who?" demanded Nick, turning suddenly so that he half-faced his companion.

"Loco Juan. Crazy John, if you want the translation of the name. He is a Mexican outlaw who——"

"Yes. I have heard about him," said Nick quietly.

"Oh! You have, eh?"

"Yes. I don't suppose, partner, that you could tell me which one of that bunch Loco happens to be, could you?"

"Hardly—in this light."

"They all look rather alike at this distance, don't they?"

"Yes. Only, if I were to make a guess about it, I should say——"

"Well?"

"I should say that Loco is the one who remained directly in front of us across the track when the others moved away in either direction."

"I think I will chance it that you are correct," said the detective slowly, and for the first time drawing a revolver into view. "I am interested in getting a little nearer view of Loco Juan."

"Do you mean that you are going to take a shot at him?"

"Yes. That looks like a good horse, although one can't tell much about it in this——"

"Look out!"

Five shots from five different directions plunged into the frame of the tank over their heads.

"They are bound to riddle this darkness with their bullets, said Nick carelessly. "If they keep up that sort of thing, they are bound to hit us before long. Just move away about six feet, will you, and lie flat on the ground?

I think that after that it would be a good idea to crawl out away from the tank to the extremity of the shadow."

He stepped in the opposite direction himself, and then as he dropped to the ground, following the advice he had given to his companion, he threw up his right hand and fired the weapon he had drawn a moment before.

It was a long shot and the light was extremely imperfect; but, nevertheless, the man who was seated like an equestrian statue directly to the south of the tank put up his hand suddenly and managed to catch his hat which had been lifted from his head as if a gust of wind had blown it away in passing.

Instantly there was a scurrying out of range by the whole five horsemen, for they wheeled their horses and rode away from the tank with all speed, still, however, holding their relative positions in regard to it; but not before each one of them had sent an answering shot against the tank.

"That was a clever catch that your friend Loco made," said Nick, with a chuckle.

"It was a cleverer shot on your part," was the reply. "A few inches lower and Loco Juan's light would have gone out—and southeastern Montana would have been rid of about the slickest desperado that the Western country has known for some years."

"Yes," replied Nick carelessly. "That was my only fear."

"Eh? What was?"

"That I might shoot a trifle low in this light."

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not mean to kill him when you fired?"

"Yes. I have a distinct interest in holding an interview with him before he turns up his toes. He is the man I came out here to see."

"Oh! But wait, before we go on with that subject. I want to know if you are trying to convince me that you *intended* to knock his hat off his head without hurting him?"

There was an incredulous smile on the young man's face which Nick could have seen if the shadow where they were had been less dense; all the same, he knew it was there, by the tone in which the question was asked.

"No," he replied. "Not exactly that." Then he added quietly:

"I think they will hold off out of range, until daylight. Don't you, Mr. Strong?" The young man started. Then he laughed in a low tone.

"You seem to have the advantage of me," he said. "It is evident that you have known me from the first."

"No," said Nick. "Not from the first. I did know you, however, as soon as I stopped you as you were leaving the car."

"You mean that you recognized me then?"

"Yes."

"But I haven't the least idea who you are."

"No. I suppose not. You are not as much in the habit of sizing up strangers as I am. In your country you don't come in contact with strangers quite as much as I do in mine. And, again, I suppose you know the face of every man who lives within a hundred miles of your South Dakota ranch, do you not?"

"I suppose I do."

"I wasn't aware that you had any vested interests in Montana," continued Nick. "Have you taken up a new venture out here, Mr. Strong?"

"Why, yes. I suppose when you get to it you will tell me who you are, so I won't stop to question you on that point just now. I have another ranch here. A fine one, too."

"Good. I foresee that you and I will become very much better acquainted. Is your ranch near here?"

"Yes. Twenty miles or a little more, to the northwest."

"What do you call the place? What is your brand out here?"

"Double-O."

"Eh? Double-O? Two O's, side by side with a hyphen between them? Isn't it sometimes called O-bar-O?"

"Yes," laughed Strong. "If you should hear some of the boys pronounce it you would suppose that it was one word and was spelled *'obero.'*"

"It seems, then," said the detective, "that it was your ranch that I was headed for all the time, only I didn't know that it belonged to you."

"The ranch has only just come into my possession."

"I see."

Nick took two or three quick steps to one side as he spoke, and fired his revolver a second time; and this time there was a howl of rage from out on the plain, and a volley of pistol-shots was returned from the waiting men, who hastily withdrew to a safer distance.

"They were creeping up on us," said Nick in explanation, as he again threw himself on the ground beside his companion. "I don't think that I hurt that fellow much. If the bullet went true, he got it in the arm."

"You speak as if you could drive a nail at any distance, even in the dark, with that gun of yours, sir," said Strong not without admiration in his voice.

"Well, I suppose I can—almost. It is not skill, however, it is a talent."

"Oh. Isn't that a distinction without a difference?"

"Possibly. Those fellows will keep at a safe distance now, I reckon."

"They will wait until daylight now," replied Strong. "Are you a Southerner, Mr.———" He waited for Nick to fill in the blank; but the detective only smiled through the darkness, and ignoring the unfilled blank, he replied:

"No. I am a New Yorker; but I like some of the

Southern expressions. I wish you would tell me something about this fellow Loco Juan, Mr. Strong."

"I am afraid I can't. The fact is, I don't know much about him."

"Isn't that true of almost everybody around here?" asked Nick.

"Yes. He is a sort of mystery. I suppose, however, that I ought to be rather grateful to him on one account."

"Indeed? Why is that?"

"I never would have owned Double-O if it were not for Loco."

"Again, why is that?"

"It is said of him that he has made the country around here too hot to hold any respectable chap. He killed the last owner of Double-O, in fact. I bought the place from the heirs. He rustles cattle, steals horses, holds up anybody he chooses and otherwise has made himself a blister upon this region, and his name a terror to all law-abiding citizens."

"Yes," said Nick. "That is the substance of what I have heard about him. But *who is he?*"

"I will tell you what I have heard in reply to that same question. It isn't much, but it covers all that is really known about the man."

"I would like to hear it, Mr. Strong."

"Loco appeared in this region about a year ago. The first that was known of him was that he had put up a lot of buildings of stone close to the eastern slope of Big Chief butte, and that he laid claim to all the land for miles around there. All of his following is Mexican, and I have heard it variously estimated that he has anywhere from twenty-five to a hundred men around him.

"His stone castle—for it is described as a sort of castle—seems to have sprung up like a mushroom in the night, and it backs up against the rock side of the huge butte, which is almost a mountain. It is flanked on either side by other lesser buildings, and—well, the place looks as it had been several years in building, and yet nobody even saw it or heard of it until it was finished and occupied.

"As for the man himself, he is a tall, athletic, handsome fellow, about thirty years old; a daredevil in everything he does; utterly lawless; crazy, it is sometimes said; heartless, cruel, a horse-thief, a cattle-rustler, a road-agent, and, in fact, everything that is bad."

The detective nodded his head.

"And has there ever been any talk about a beautiful woman——" he asked, but he got no farther than that in the question when his companion interrupted him.

"Yes," he said. "I have never placed any credence in that story, however."

"Nevertheless, tell me what the story is, as you have heard it, Mr. Strong, please."

"Why the story is something like this: His castle is in reality a sort of cage wherein he keeps a young woman, supposedly his wife, who is amazingly beautiful. She queens it over the estate, and holds court like a veritable princess. Of course, I don't take any stock in all that sort of talk."

"You may," replied Nick, quietly. "There is such a woman there; but whether she remains there willingly or not, I do not know. That is what I am here to find out."

"Is it, indeed? Well, sir, before we go any farther on that subject, or any other, in fact, will you do me the kindness to tell me who you are?"

"Certainly." Nick got upon his feet and bowed, laughing as he did so.

"Mr. Ted Strong, King of the Wild West," he said, still laughing, "in the absence of a third party to perform the ceremony for us, I will introduce myself. I am Nick Carter, very much at your service, and very glad indeed to make your acquaintance."

CHAPTER III.

ONE AGAINST FIVE.

"I had already guessed it," said Ted Strong, clasping Nick by the hand, after which they each quietly resumed their positions on the ground, in the shadow of the tank. "I don't know why I did not get wise at once—the instant I saw you; but I didn't. I can understand now why you decided to get off the train with me; and I can also understand about that shooting of yours."

"There is one thing about our present position," said Nick, "that I do not in the least understand. Possibly you can explain it to me, Mr.——"

"Look here. We don't mister anybody out here. I'm going to call you Nick, whether you like it or not, and if you happen to want any favors from me such as the reply to a question, you'll get it by saying Ted. Now, what it is that you don't understand?"

"Why that outfit yonder was waiting for you—and how it happened that they knew you were on that particular train."

"I can explain the first part of your question."

"Well?"

"After Maxwell was killed—he was the former owner of Double-O—Loco swore, so it is said, that the land was all his under an old grant that he has obtained somewhere, and that no living man but himself should ever stay there and run it. He tried to oust Maxwell, and failing that, killed him; he has tried to oust me, and failing in that, he now wishes to kill me, too."

"I see."

"As for how he happened to know that I was on that particular train—I give it up."

"Look here, Ted, didn't you say something about your having a horse somewhere around here waiting for you?"

"Yes."

"How is that? Where is the horse, and how do you know that one is waiting for you?"

"I left him here three days ago."

"Oh! Just wandering around as he pleased, waiting for you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then it is more than likely that one out of that outfit out there has roped him," said the detective; but Ted Strong only smiled as he replied:

"They couldn't do it. Imp wouldn't let anybody get near enough to him to do that. I own two horses that are almost human in their intelligence, Nick," he added. "One is a big, black fellow that I call Sultan; he stays at Moon Valley all the while. This one is a blood bay. His name is Emperor, but I shortened that to Emp, and then it became Imp—which seems the most appropriate of all. He is waiting around here somewhere, for my whistle."

"Perhaps," said Nick, "if that bunch couldn't rope him, they might shoot him."

"They couldn't do that, either. Imp knows enough to keep out of range."

"Where is your saddle and bridle, Ted?"

"Inside a cedar chest that I have got buried in the ground out yonder in the sage-brush. I buried it there for the purpose. You see, now that I have two ranches, only about a hundred and twenty miles apart, I will want to go from one to the other, frequently. This spur of the Burlington & Missouri River road that they built down the bank of the Powder River last year brings me within about twenty-five miles of Double-O, and that renders it rather easy to go from one place to the other. I have got Imp trained so that I turn him loose here, and he waits around for me until I return. He knows where to find all he wants to eat."

There was silence for a few moments after that, and then the detective said:

"Ted, I don't relish sitting here all night, like a couple of chumps, waiting on the pleasure of those fellows out there."

"Nor I, either."

"Let's wake them up."

"I'm agreeable, Nick. How do you propose to do it?"

The detective arose and made the circuit of the tank-house before he replied. Then he said:

"I think that our weapons will carry to where they are, enough to hurt a little if one of the bullets should happen to strike."

"Yes."

"Well, you take the north and the east sides of the tank. I will take the south and the west sides. I'll go around to the south side now, and when you hear me shoot, you do the same. Then take a jump for the east side and let her drive again; I will do the same at the west. That will give them the idea that there are four of us at least, and if we shoot close enough they will begin to think it isn't healthy around here."

"Go ahead," said Ted.

"We might keep on shooting until they are rather well convinced," continued the detective, "only change from one position to the other each time you fire."

A moment later spurts of fire darted from each side of the tank one after another, and the outlaws, who were waiting out on the plain for the appearance of their victims, returned the fire with interest.

It was apparent that no harm was done on either side, but after the fusillade was over the five men withdrew entirely out of range, and then bunching together evidently held a consultation, the result of which was that after a short wait they rode away toward the northeast, and presently disappeared from view.

"That seemed to surprise them," said the detective.

"Yes," replied Ted; "but all the same they haven't gone very far."

"No; I suppose not."

"They will wait around somewhere till morning; then they will try to ambush us between here and the ranch."

"But, Ted, this gives you a chance to call your horse."

"What good would the horse do us now? He would only be in danger of getting wounded if he were here."

"You can ride him without a saddle, can't you, Ted?"

"Sure; or a bridle either. But what difference does that make?"

"Only that there is nothing to prevent you from lighting out of here, as soon as Imp puts in an appearance."

"You don't suppose for a minute, do you, that I am going to ride off and leave you here, unhorsed?"

"No. I know you wouldn't if there was any danger to me in doing so."

"What do you mean? Do you suppose that I'm going to leave you here alone to stand off that bunch out there?"

"Sure thing."

Nick smiled; then he added:

"Look here, Ted, I haven't the slightest notion of walking twenty-five or thirty miles to Double-O Ranch; neither have I a notion of compelling Imp to carry double. It is uncomfortable for the animal and the men as well."

"Well? I don't understand yet what you are driving at."

"I'm driving at your horse. I want you to call him, then mount him, saddle or no saddle, and mosey out of here for the ranch. When you get there, send back some of your men with an extra horse for me, and I'll be ready to ride home with them."

"Yes; if those duffers out there haven't taken your scalp in the meantime."

"Oh; they won't hurt me any, Ted."

"You will be terribly exposed here, where you are. If you had a horse——"

"I don't want a horse—until your men get back with one. I've got something that is just as good."

"Eh? What is it?"

"A water-tank."

"I don't in the least know what you mean."

"Ted, I have got two big Smith & Wesson's, and two smaller guns up my sleeves. That makes twenty shots that are all ready. Right there is a ladder—see it?" He pointed toward the ladder which led to the top of the tank.

"Yes."

"When you have called your horse and ridden away on him, I will shin up that ladder to the top. Maybe you haven't noticed the fact, but the tank proper is braced against two heavy timbers that run all the way around it, and there is plenty of room for me to lie behind those timbers out of sight. A bullet cannot pierce them—but if one of those chaps should take it into his head to venture too close to the tank a bullet can travel out over the timbers mighty quick. See?"

"Yes," said Ted. "All the same——"

"All the same, Ted, I'd take it as a special favor if you would consent to do what I say, so that I can have a mount to the ranch. I've got this grip to bother with, you know, and——"

"Oh, if you put it that way——"

"I do."

Without another word Ted stepped out into the moonlight, and placing his fingers to his lips, he uttered a shrill whistle that was half a tune and was almost impossible to counterfeit save by one who had an exquisite ear for music; and this he repeated three times and then returned to the detective's side.

"That will fetch him," he said; and sure enough, scarcely a moment had elapsed before they could hear the sound of galloping hoofs, which presently ceased and was followed by a shrill neigh.

This time Ted whistled again, but with an entirely different cadence, and one that was even more difficult of being counterfeited; and immediately after that the horse came dashing toward them without fear that he was approaching a possible foe.

"I have trained him that way," said the young ranchman, as he patted the horse's neck and rubbed his cheek against the soft muzzle. "He will not reply to me if I whistle only once or twice; but when I repeat it three times, he comes a little way toward me and calls for that last signal, as you heard him do it just now. When he hears that, he knows that everything is all right. All the same, Nick, I don't like to leave you here."

"Nonsense. I'll be as safe as a church. You ought to be back here by daylight."

"Yes; or a little before that."

"Well, I don't believe those fellows will bother me before that. So long, Ted."

Without another word he seized his satchel and ran rapidly up the ladder toward the top of the tank; and Ted leaped upon Imp's back and sped away through the moonlight, toward his ranch, twenty-five miles away.

And Nick, having gained the perch at the top, made himself comfortable, and with the satchel under his head for a pillow, resolved to get a little rest and sleep; for, to tell the truth, he had not the most remote idea that the outlaws would return at all.

He argued that even if they should approach the tank in the darkness, they would not attempt to come too near, for they had already received a proof of the marksmanship of the men who had concealed themselves there, and Loco must by this time be satisfied that there was at least more than one.

"Anyhow," he thought to himself, as he stretched out at full length behind the barricade, "the whole thing swayed when I climbed the ladder, and nobody could creep up it without waking me."

In this belief he was soon fast asleep.

But out across the moonlight those signaling whistles had been heard. Eyes had seen and noted the departure of the horse with its single rider, and the crafty Mexican had already decided in his own mind that there had been at least one man left behind at the tank.

And so it happened that within an hour after Ted's departure, the five outlaws rode into view again, from five different directions, and had Nick Carter been on the watch instead of soundly sleeping, he must have seen them.

As it was, he slept on undisturbed while they stealthily approached.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OUTLAWS' FIENDISH TRICK.

The first intimation that the detective had that his stronghold was about to be invaded came when he was awakened suddenly to a consciousness that the structure was trembling under some force which was not the wind, since there was no wind to speak of.

He remained quite still for a moment, listening, and then cautiously he raised himself to his elbow, partly turned over, and, exercising great care, peered over the timbers into the realm below him.

At first he could see nothing, for the moon was shining brightly where he was, while below him everything was in shadow; but after a moment he discerned first one figure and then another until he counted five, and he knew that the entire outfit of attack was there.

One of them was already half-way up the ladder; the others were grouped around the foot of it watching his ascent.

Had their eyes been fixed less intently upon their venturesome companion, some of them would have dis-

covered the detective as he peered over the timbered protection; but as it was he escaped unnoticed; and he drew his head quickly back again lest his luck should not continue.

His own position was exactly at the top of the ladder, and as he drew back again he thought rapidly about what it was best for him to do under the circumstances.

He knew that it would be impossible for them to dislodge him from his perch with bullets, for they would not pierce the heavy timbers that protected him, and he could easily shoot any person who would dare to attempt the ascent as this fellow was doing now.

And then a startling thought occurred to him.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself. "I hadn't thought of that. There are only four trains a day over this spur of the railroad—two in each direction. There will not be another train along here until long after daylight, and there is nothing in the world to hinder those fellows from burning this thing down. They could roast me out of here in no time if they should get the idea and cared to put it into execution."

He had not thought of that possibility when he insisted upon Ted's leaving him to ride to the ranch; but now it came to him as a menace which should not be lightly put aside.

And then he smiled broadly.

"I think there is a way to prevent even that," he told himself grimly; and he prepared to put into execution the plan which had so suddenly occurred to him.

His two big revolvers, which had been within easy reach of his hands while he slept, he now pushed to one side; then he turned his body over and drew his knees under him, crouching low so as to remain out of sight—and waited.

All this time the man on the ladder was stealthily but rapidly approaching, and Nick had not been in his position of readiness more than a full minute before he realized by the sound that in another instant the man would make his appearance.

Then came the instant when the head and shoulders of the fellow were suddenly thrust almost into Nick Carter's face; and it was at that selfsame instant that the detective's hands shot out and gripped with the tightness of a vise the throat of the outlaw.

It was done so quickly and so certainly and with such strength that there was no time or opportunity for the man to utter a cry.

He could only struggle with his feet and kick against the ladder lustily, when he was seized; and then with his feet dangling and kicking in the air, he was drawn inward and over the timbers.

The instant he was there, Nick released one hand long enough to seize upon one of his own revolvers, and with the butt of it he rapped his captive soundly upon the top of his head, so that he stiffened out instantly and offered no further resistance.

It all happened while you could have counted five—and then all was still again.

Of course the men below on the ground had heard the struggles of their companion; but they had heard no other sound than that; and immediately following upon the strange occurrence the same silence that had reigned before obtained.

It was all very mysterious—at least so they seemed to think; and while the detective rapidly bound and gagged his captive so that it would be impossible for him to make any effort to escape, he smiled to himself pleasantly.

"That will give them something to think about for a moment or two," he thought.

It was evident that they could not at all understand why their companion had failed to cry out and give the alarm if he had been attacked; why he had not released his hold upon the ladder and fallen back among them in time to save himself; or if he had been stabbed, why there was no dripping blood to tell the tale.

After a little a cautious call came up to Nick's ears from below.

"Manuel! Manuel!" was the call, half-whispered, half-spoken; but of course there was no reply.

The detective might easily have leaned over the timbers now, and have shot one by one, before they could get out of range, all four of the remaining outlaws—but he did not wish to do that.

In the first place, his mission in that part of the country made it necessary that he should capture Loco Juan alive if that were possible, and in the second, he had no joy in that sort of wholesale slaughter so long as it was not necessary to commit it.

His own life was in no immediate danger.

The outlaws could not reach him now, and after what had just occurred he had little or no fear that they would resort to fire as an expedient for driving him out, since if they did so, one of their own companions was up there, to burn—or to be left there to burn even if the man they sought should dare to make his appearance.

But now, when the outlaws received no response to their calls, they were suddenly convinced that their companion had been killed or captured, for in an instant they leaped back away from the tank, and as they did so each one of them sent a bullet into the woodwork around the spot where Nick Carter was lying.

But Nick kept silent.

He made no response whatever to their assault, knowing the silence would only deepen the mystery of the disappearance of their companion.

They fired at the tower but the once, and receiving no response, they halted together in a bunch at a little distance from the tower and appeared to be consulting.

Again the detective could easily have picked them off;

but he had no more desire to do so than before; and still he waited.

Nor did he permit his own head to be seen above the timbers that protected him. The moon shone brightly across the top of the tower, and he would instantly have been discovered had he done so.

Just one quick peek he gave, to see what they did after firing their revolvers, and then he stretched out again prone upon the planking; for he knew that they could not attempt an ascent of the ladder without apprising him of the fact by the trembling of the timbers.

Once he began to think that they had withdrawn altogether, and he was about to raise his head once more to take a look at them when he heard whispering voices below and he knew that they had again approached the foot of the ladder.

He did not look to see what they were doing.

Had he done so he would have discovered how little they considered the safety of the man he had captured; for if the truth be told, they had brought to the foot of the tower, armful after armful of dried sage-brush, and were piling it against the bottom of the ladder.

They worked so silently that the detective had no suspicion of what they were doing, and he had already decided that they would not roast their own friend; so he did not consider the probability of fire.

But Loco Juan was not one to stand upon the sacrifice of one of his men when he had an object to attain; and he was about to prove it.

The detective looked at his watch by the light of the moon and discovered that Ted had been gone four hours; and then, just as he came to the conclusion that at least two more hours must elapse before he could hope for the return of the young ranchman, he heard a crackling noise beneath him, and he smelled smoke.

Instantly following upon that, the space around him suddenly flared into brilliancy—and Nick Carter knew that the worst had happened. He knew that the outlaws had built a fire around the base of the tower and intended to roast him out.

And he knew, too, that the instant his head appeared above the timbers that protected him he would get a bullet through his brain.

There seemed to be only one thing for him to do—and when the time came, he determined to do it.

That was, to wait until the last moment; to wait until the fire was licking around him; until his hiding place became untenantable because of the heat and smoke, and then to make one flying leap through space to the ground, trusting that below him, and to trust to chance that he might alight without broken bones, and that some opportunity would be found for him to make a fight for his life.

At first there was very little smoke.

The sage-brush was extremely dry and it burned brightly with little smoke; but the timbers of the watch-tower were not so well seasoned, and while this fact stood for him in the fact that they burned less readily and, in fact, very slowly, they made smoke.

Having started the fire, the outlaws withdrew to a comparatively safe distance to watch the blaze they had created; and once when Nick took a peep at them, protected by the rising smoke, he could see that they stood with their guns in their hands prepared to fire at the first appearance of a target that was worthy of their ammunition.

"It is rather odd," thought the detective, "that I should have deliberately walked into a mess like this. Those fellows down there haven't the least idea who is up here. If they knew who I am, it would not be so funny, and they would probably be all the more determined to get me somehow; but they do not know.

"I have been in dangerous places a great many times, but this is the first time in my recollection when I have been threatened by enemies who had no suspicion of my identity."

In the meantime, the fire was rapidly gaining headway; but all the same the timbers of which the tower was constructed were big and square and tough, and the structure did not burn half so readily as might have been expected.

The rolling smoke now almost concealed the top of the tower from the sight of the men below, and after Nick had tested the expedient of looking over the barrier by raising his hat above the timbers, he ventured to peer out himself.

He could see them dimly through the smoke, although they could not see him, and he was about to send a bullet among them to drive them farther away, when, chancing to look at his captive, he discovered that the man's eyes were open, and that they were distended with horror.

Plainly the man realized the danger he was in; and instantly Nick removed the gag from his mouth.

"Yell, now! Yell for your friends who are roasting you to death!" he said in Spanish, for the fellow was Mexican. "Call to them and tell them to put the fire out or you will burn!"

The fellow needed no second bidding.

"Help! *Help! Help!*" he called in his own language. "Pedro! Miguel! Don Juan!"

"Hello there Manuel!" cried back a voice from below. "Save me! Save me, or I burn with fire!" shouted Manuel in reply.

"Who is there with you? How many?" came the answering shout; and before Nick could interfere, Manuel had replied;

"There is only one, Don Juan! Save me. Kill him! Save me!"

"Save yourself, you dog!" shouted back his chief. "It serves you right for letting yourself be captured so easily.

We will roast you both together!" and Loco laughed as if he were intensely amused by the idea.

"Curse you! Curses on you all! May you roast in Hades!" was the despairing cry of Manuel in reply to that.

CHAPTER V.

A DOUBLE LEAP FOR LIFE.

And now all four of the waiting outlaws joined in the laugh at the predicament of their late companion; and Nick, watching him, could see the man grind his teeth with rage, while an expression of fury came into his eyes that was awful to see.

And Nick Carter decided then and there to save the life of this man if he could.

For the detective knows the Mexican nature extremely well; and he also knows the characteristics of the different races of Mexico—and this man, he realized now, was a Guerreran; a man who belonged to a race of people older than the Egyptians; a race which never forgets nor forgives an injury and which ever remembers a friendly service; and observing this, the detective spoke to the fellow in his own native dialect—the Guerreran.

"My friend," he said, "your companions have abandoned you to a dreadful fate."

The eyes of the man brightened at once at the familiar sound of his own tongue, and for a moment he seemed to forget the danger he was in, for he gazed in wonder upon Nick Carter, and then he murmured, also in Guerreran:

"You know my language? Eh, señor?"

"Yes. I have traveled among your people. You are the only Guerreran here; no? If there was another down there, he would not abandon you so, would he?"

"No! A thousand times no, señor!"

"Guerrerans are never cowards, Manuel."

"No, señor. I can burn if it is necessary, and never cry out."

"I know that; but it is not necessary, Manuel."

The Guerreran shrugged his shoulders; he turned his eyes toward the masses of smoke that were rolling about them, and the ghost of a smile played about his swarthy lips.

"I will save you," said Nick.

"Is it possible, señor?" asked Manuel.

"I think so—yes. If it is not possible, at least I will not desert you, as your friends have done."

"Then, señor, untie these bonds and set me free so that I can help you," was the calm reply. It was plain now that all the courage of the man had returned.

"First, swear to me on the cross that you will be true to me," said Nick. "I know that a Guerreran keeps his oath. Swear, Manuel!"

"I swear, señor, by my soul and on the sacred cross, that if you save me from this fate by fire, I will serve you faithfully to the end of my life."

Without a word more the detective cut the bonds that held him.

"You are free, Manuel," he said. "You have your own weapons. You see how entirely I trust you."

"*Si, señor.* I am your servant henceforth."

He straightened his body, stretched his arms and raised himself to a sitting posture.

"Be careful," said Nick. "Your former friends will put a bullet into you."

The remark seemed to bring Manuel entirely to his senses, for on the instant he pulled the two revolvers he carried in his belt, and before Nick realized what he was doing, he had begun with each hand to send bullet after bullet whizzing toward the group of outlaws, which could be dimly seen through the rolling smoke that surrounded them.

One of the men went down without a sound; a second uttered a yell and spun half-way around, after which, still yelling, he dashed away through the night as if Satan were after him.

A third uttered a curse and clapped his right hand to his left shoulder, and all—save the one who had fallen never to rise again—fled precipitately from the glow of the firelight into the darkness beyond it.

Nick laughed. He could not have helped doing that if he had tried.

"You have put one of them out of the reckoning, Manuel, and you hit two others," he announced. "Surely I could wish for no better proof of your intention to serve me. It is high time for us to get out of here, too."

"The ladder?" asked Manuel, now as cool and as much a master of himself as Nick Carter himself.

"The ladder is burning," replied Nick. "It must be a jump for life; nothing less."

"*Si, señor.* I am ready. *Dispues, usted, señor;*" which, being translated, means "after you, sir."

The heat at the top of the tower had already become extremely uncomfortable, and so the detective did not wait an instant longer.

Gathering himself together, and without hesitation, he leaped into the air and outward, clearing the barrier behind which he had been hiding, and shot down through the smoke and flame toward the ground that was twenty feet below him.

It was a wild leap and a dangerous one, at best, for there was little doubt that bullets would be aimed at him in addition to the dangers of the fall itself.

But he alighted uninjured, save for the shock of the fall itself, and he rolled over upon the ground and leaped to his feet, scarcely the worse for the adventure.

As he did so he was conscious of a heavy fall near him, and he realized that Manuel had lost no time in following, but also that he had moved to one side in order that he

might not fall upon the man whom he now regarded as his savior.

But Manuel did not rise after he struck the ground. Instead, he rolled over on his side, and uttered one low groan, as if he were badly hurt.

"Run," he said to Nick. "Get into the darkness where they cannot see you to shoot you. I cannot rise, señor."

He was not the athlete that Nick Carter was and he had not known so well how to take that leap. The consequence was that his leg had broken under the impact, and he was for the moment helpless.

But Nick leaped toward him and raised him in his arms, and the next instant he had leaped away from the glow of the fire, into the sheltering darkness beyond it; for now the half moon had sunk so low in the west that it afforded very little light.

Three bullets whizzed past him as he ran with his burden, and having secured what he believed a sufficient distance, he dropped Manuel upon the ground and, lying down himself beside him, sent back as many in reply, aiming them toward the spot from which he believed they had come; and Manuel, notwithstanding the pain he was suffering, rolled over on his belly and sent shot after shot from his own revolvers hurtling through the smoke of the fire toward the darkness that was beyond it.

And now the detective leaped to his feet again and once more seizing the Guerreran in his arms, ran with him again to a safer distance; and there, fortunately, he came upon a deep hollow in the ground into which he plunged and deposited his burden, in comparative safety.

"How strong you are!" was the only comment that Manuel made.

"Their bullets cannot hit us here," replied Nick. "Now I will have a look at that leg of yours. It is broken, Manuel?"

"I think so—yes. But do not mind it now."

"Sure, I'll mind it. You listen and keep watch while I work. Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"No, señor."

The detective drew his knife and slit from top to bottom one leg of the buckskin trousers that Manuel wore, and so bared the wounded leg. Manuel all the while protesting that it was not necessary that he should receive attention.

"A broken bone should be set at once," replied Nick. "Otherwise it swells around the fracture so that setting it becomes impossible. Now I am going to hurt you, Manuel."

A grim smile spread across the Guerreran's features, and he did not even wince when Nick forced the two ends of the broken bone into place.

"Now, Manuel," he said, "I want you to promise me that you will lie perfectly still and not move a muscle until I return, no matter what happens."

Without awaiting a reply, he dashed away toward the burning tower again; and presently he was back once more with his satchel in his grasp.

"I tossed it out before I jumped," he explained, as he pulled it open and took from it a wide roll of adhesive plaster which he never traveled without.

He had brought with him also, from the burning tower, two splinters of wood which he had kicked loose from the burning ladder, and now, with the huge knife that Manuel carried in his belt, he proceeded to trim these into rude splints for the fractured leg.

In a moment he had them in place, and then with the adhesive plaster he bound the leg tightly round and round.

When that was done and the leg was fixed so that the bones could not get out of place again, Nick laughingly fixed a strip of the plaster down the side of the leather trousers, and thus fastened together the rent he had made with his knife.

"There," he said. "You see that I am a tailor as well as a surgeon. Now, take a swallow of this brandy and then reload your pistols. You may need them."

"Señor," said Manuel, with more emotion than he had shown during all the time his leg had been ministered to, "I shall never forget your kindness."

After a moment of silence, he asked:

"Were you fired upon when you returned to the tower, señor?"

"No."

"Then Loco Juan and his men have gone away."

"He has gone away with two of his men," replied Nick significantly. "They carried the other one, I think."

"It was a narrow escape for us, señor."

"Quite so," replied Nick smiling. "But we are out of it now."

"Loco will return with more men presently," said Manuel.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it, señor. There are ten more men within five miles of here."

"Humph!" murmured Nick. "All the same, I think that it is possible for Ted Strong to get here before Loco returns."

"I will reply to all of them, señor. I am your servant now, and henceforth. But——"

"What, Manuel?"

"He is a dangerous man; a man with great power."

"So I have heard; but I have traveled more than two thousand miles to find him, so I do not think that I will turn back."

"No, señor; you are not one who would turn back."

"There is a beautiful young woman there at his castle, is there not, Manuel?"

"*Si, señor.* An angel."

"Who is she? What is her name?"

"Ah! Her name?—we call her, or rather we speak of

her, Donna Carmelita. Who she is I do not know? She is not happy."

"To-morrow I shall ask you more about her, Manuel."

"*Sí, señor.* I am at your service."

"Have you been inside the house of Loco Juan? The house that is called his castle?"

"No, señor. The men do not enter there, save the few who serve inside the building. It is death for one of the outside men to attempt it."

"Really!" said Nick. "Loco makes a regular baron of himself; but that is not surprising, if he is the man I think he is."

"Hark!" said Manuel. "What is that? Horses. They are approaching. It is Loco returning to kill us, perhaps. Well, señor, we will not be the only ones who die. You see now that it was not necessary that my leg should be set; no?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE.

There proved to be no occasion for a fight, however, for the approaching horsemen turned out to be Ted Strong and a half-dozen of his celebrated company of young rough riders, who were temporarily staying at "Double-O."

The detective permitted them to ride into full view, in the glow of the blazing tower, before he made any signal to them; but then he called out:

"There we are, Ted, as large as life and as plain as day."

A cheer went up from the seven men at once, for until that instant all of them believed that Nick Carter had either perished in the burning tower, or had been shot to death by the outlaws; or, at least, had been carried off a prisoner.

They wheeled their horses with exclamations of pleasure, and in a moment pulled up beside the hollow wherein Nick and Manuel were waiting; and Nick rose to greet them.

"Hello!" exclaimed Ted. "What have you got there? Who is your prisoner, Nick?"

"He is not a prisoner; he is a recruit, Ted," replied the detective; and then in a few words and very concisely he related all that had happened while the young mexicano was away on his ride to the ranch and back again.

"Manuel is a Guerreran," he said, when he had completed the story. "His ancestors have obeyed no laws save those they made for themselves, since Atlanta was a continent and Plato had never been heard of; so you must not hold it against him that he has been allied with an outlaw. The Guerreros and the Oaxacans are the only native Mexicans whom President Diaz respects; and hence the only ones he has reason to fear. And now, Ted, I hope you brought two extra horses with you, instead of one."

"Unfortunately I did not; but two of the boys can ride double, and Manuel shall have a mount. Now, Nick."

"Yes?"

"This big duffer, here, is Bud Morgan; maybe you've heard of him?"

"Sure," said Nick, smiling, and extending his hand. "I understand, Bud," he continued, with easy familiarity which he knew would be taken as a compliment under the circumstances, "that you are Ted's chief reliance; eh?"

"Well, Nick," drawled Morgan, with a broad grin of pleasure on his expansive face, "yeh see Ted sure couldn't get along if it wasn't for uh bunch of us around him. But we're mostly useful in corralling the schoolmarms so's they can't rope him;" and Bud deftly pinched out the fire of a cigarette he had been smoking, and proceeded to roll another in its place.

The ride to the ranch was a painful one to Manuel, but he bore it with a stoicism that was almost phenomenal, replying in an even tone whenever he was addressed, although his English was not at all perfect. Sometimes he appealed to Nick to interpret for him, but nevertheless he seemed to understand all that was said, even though he could not always find the words to reply.

The sun was almost three hours high when they arrived at the ranch, and Nick Carter confessed that he was both tired and hungry.

But after the inner man had been well supplied, and Manuel had been properly cared for, so that he rested easily, Nick found that his fatigue had left him, and with Ted on one side of him and Bud on the other, they seated themselves on the wide veranda.

"As the crow flies," said Ted, pointing toward the southeast, "Moon Valley is one hundred and twenty miles in that direction. I have an idea that some day I will have a string of ranches from the Black Hills all the way to the Whitewater, in Canada; but that is very far in the future."

"This is a beautiful spot, Ted," said Nick, in reply.

"Yes," drawled Bud; "but it ain't a patch on the Moon. Yeh sure oughter see the Moon, Nick. And we have some sure good times down there, too."

"I don't think I can tell you how pleased I am to have you here," said Ted to the detective. "I have had the idea more than once that I would send you a letter asking you to make me a visit, but for some reason it has never been written."

"And I," replied Nick, "have been quite as anxious to know you. Well, I am here now, anyway, and I don't suppose you will be rid of me for some time to come."

"We sure hope not," murmured Bud.

"Do you feel like telling us about what brought you here, Nick?" asked Ted, after a pause.

"Certainly. I told you there, in the shadow of the water-tower, that I came after Loco Juan Santillos, didn't I?"

"Yes; but none of the particulars."

"Well, it is rather a long story, if I should go into detail, but I will give you the gist of it, if you're ready to hear it."

The detective relighted his cigar, which had gone out.

"Eighteen years ago," he said, "a child who was at that time five years old disappeared from her home—the child was a girl—in the city of Morelia, in Mexico. The father of the child was an American, and the mother was a Spanish woman whose family had lived in Mexico for many generations.

"The family name of the mother was Santillos, and——"

"And Loco Juan Santillos was the fellow who stole the child?" interrupted Morgan.

"Shut up, Bud!" said Ted. "If you listen long enough, you'll learn."

"Loco Juan Santillos is presumably the man who stole the child, although, if that is true, he was himself but little more than a child at that time. He could not have been more than sixteen at the most, then; but inasmuch as the boy Juan Santillos disappeared at the same time, it has always been supposed that he did steal his baby cousin.

"Now, it happens that I never heard of this case at all until a few weeks ago; but at that time the father of Carmen Glenn—that is her name if she is alive—came to me to ask me to take his case.

"Briefly, he has spent all the years of his life since the disappearance of his daughter in the effort to find some trace of her, for he has never believed that she was dead, although every one of his friends has insisted that she is. His wife died soon after the disappearance of the child, and for eighteen years Richard Glenn has done nothing but wander from place to place among the mountains of lower Mexico, in Guerrero, and Oaxaca principally, searching for Juan Santillos, to kill him if he found him, and for his daughter, to reclaim her, no matter what might have happened to her in that long space of time."

"And how——"

"Wait a moment. Six months ago Mr. Glenn met with an accident. He is now a cripple. He can no longer prosecute the search himself. But before he sustained the injury, he discovered a few facts that had always escaped him before that."

"And they were——"

"For one thing, he had been following a will-o'-the-wisp. Juan Santillos had not been in Mexico for years. He had been most of the time in Europe; but of late it was reported that he had returned to the United States and had taken up his residence in southeastern Montana, where he had resumed the life he loved best."

"The life of an outlaw," said Ted.

"Yes; and had surrounded himself with a horde of Mexicans, who served him faithfully and who would fight to the death for him."

"I reckon that's no dream, either," said Bud, sotto voce.

"Briefly, that is the story," continued the detective. "Incidentally, I might mention that Santillos is a very rich man. In Guerrero he owns mines which produce more gold than he can dispose of. Also, incidentally, the father of Carmen Glenn is a very rich man.

"His informants, before he came to me, told him that Juan Santillos, called Loco Juan because of his utter disregard for law and order, and because of the crazy things he does, had built himself a castle of stone near Big Chief butte, in southeastern Montana, and that it was reported that he had with him there a young woman who was so very beautiful that all who had seen her raved about her——"

"And that ain't no idle dream, neither," said Bud suddenly. "If I could have my pick uh the hull bunch uh beauties I've ever seen, I'd take her blindfolded; you hear me!"

"Have you seen her?" asked Nick.

"Seen her? Of course I've seen her! Do you think that I could hear of a roarin' beauty like that, a-livin' in the immejut neighborhood, and not *see* her?"

"Well," continued Nick, "I'll take occasion to ask you about that later on, Bud. I'm at the end of the story now. All that remains to tell is that I am here for three purposes. One is to ascertain if that young lady *is* Carmen Glenn; another is to take her to her father if she is Carmen Glenn; and the third one is to capture Loco Juan alive and to take him in person to Richard Glenn, no matter who this girl at the castle happens to be."

"It strikes me that you have got quite a contract on hand, Nick," said Ted, smiling.

"I suppose so; but I have a habit of always living up to my contracts."

"So I have heard."

"And now that I have fortunately lighted upon you and Bud Morgan, I reckon that I will not be without assistance in my efforts."

"Yeh'll have that good and plenty, Nick," drawled Bud. "We sure will rout that black devil out uh his castle, as he calls it; and we sure will take another peep at the beauty, if yeh don't happen to have no objections, Nick. I ain't got much in my war-bag jest at present, but such as the contents are, the fair Carmen can have every doggoned article there is, from my old chaps to my best quirt."

"Do you know anything about the place where Loco lives, Ted?" asked Nick.

"No; not a word more than I have told you already," was the reply.

"But I do," said Bud.

"Tell us what you know, Bud," said Ted.

"Well, I know that it ain't no dream about there bein' a castle down against that butte. It is more'n a mere butte, too; it is almost a mountain."

"Go on, Bud."

"All the punchers around here tells me that the castle was built in a night; that nobody seen it at all until it stood there, all finished, as nice as you please; but to my way uh supposin' that there edifice weren't put up in any time less than a good many months—and it wasn't done, either, without a-plenty uh hands to do it."

"Describe it, Bud."

"It's two stories high, mostly. It's built uh stone and it backs up right against a rocky face uh the butte where the old hill used to look as if somebody had cut off a piece of it with a knife.

"Mebby yeh don't know about it, but on that side uh the butte there is a b'ilin' spring that sheds about a ton uh water a minute, and which comes a-steamin' down the rocks like—well, like it was in haste, so to speak. Now, what do yeh s'pose that maverick has gone and done?"

"I've no idea at all, Bud. You will have to tell."

"He's dug a ditch more'n twenty feet wide all the way around the front and on both sides of that castle, as he calls it, and he has turned the water uh that b'ilin' spring into the ditch, allowin' it to run away to waste down the coulée at the north end uh the buildings. That's what!"

"Making it somewhat difficult to approach the buildings unless he is willing; eh?"

"That sure is the case in p'int. And he's got a bridge that pulls up with a block and tackle which is balanced by a gate in the building, so that when the bridge is lowered into place it hauls up the gate, and when it is raised it lowers the gate—and there you are."

"A regular portcullis and drawbridge, isn't it?"

"Mebby so; I don't know about that. But, anyhow, there sure ain't no way uh gettin' into that place when the bridge is up, that I know of."

"But, Bud, we've got to get in. The beautiful girl is there, you know."

"That's so. I nigh did forget that for a minute. When do we start, Ted? Excuse me, Nick; I addresses the question to him, 'cause he's my captain."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN OF THE BALCONY.

It is not surprising after what he had been through that the detective should have passed the greater part of that day in sleeping; but when he made his appearance for the evening meal, he was thoroughly rested.

It had been decided after careful consultation together that nothing should be done toward investigating the surroundings of the home of Loco Juan until the following night, for it was apparent to all that they must be thoroughly "fit" before the undertaking which had brought the detective to Montana should be commenced.

Bud Morgan, however, had not been idle during the day.

As soon as the others retired to their rooms to make up for lost sleep, after that consultation on the veranda, he went to the corral, saddled his horse, and rode away alone toward the southeast; nor did he return until very late in the afternoon.

But after the meal was finished and Nick had strolled outside the house to enjoy his cigar in the open, Bud sauntered lazily after him, and as soon as they were out of ear-shot from the house, opened the conversation rather abruptly.

"I've been taking a ride, Nick," he said. "I've been over Loco way."

"Yes?" replied the detective. "Did you see anything?"

"Heaps of things. I saw the earth and sky, a few mountains, a butte, some grass and sage-brush, a bunch 'r two uh cattle, *and* a gal."

"A what?"

"A gal—*the* gal."

"Do you mean that you saw the girl whom we suppose to be Carmen Glenn?"

"I sure do, Nick."

The detective stopped in his tracks and, wheeling, faced Bud.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"Well, after you turned in to rest I thought I'd have a short peace-talk with the greaser you saved from the fire. I'm onto his lingo, you know; had uh *'dulciena del Toboso'* of my own, once upon a time, down in Tamaulipas, who ground a few *'te amos'* and *'alma de mi almas'* into my cabesa; and when Manuel found that I could talk Spanish, he opened up his trap in fine shape."

"All right. Go on."

"I told him that I wanted to rope a few particulars about that gal, *and* also to know uh thing'r two concerning the ranch; or, to put it a little more plainly, I called for five cards, and he doled 'em out to me."

"I see."

"He didn't have none too much information, at that; but such as he had, I corralled it,"

"That's your strong suit, isn't it, Bud—corralling things?"

"It sure is. Well, old Manuel admitted to me that ever since he has been a membr of that bunch uh worries over at Loco's, he ain't found nothing that pleased him

quite so much as it did to sit silentlike and gaze upon the sweet face of that angel in petticoats. So he——"

"What's that, Bud? He was stringing you, I'm afraid."

"Nary a string, Nick. It was dead straight."

"But he told me that he had never been inside of the house, and— "

"No more he has. He didn't have tuh go inside to look at her."

"Go on, Bud. I see that you have got something to tell."

"I have—a-plenty."

"Well?"

"Mebby yeh recall the fact that you've been told that the house that Loco built lies up against the butte? No?"

Nick nodded.

"Yeh understand, uh course, that I don't mean that the building touches the butte, but that it comes mighty close to it, with only that ditch through which the b'ilin' water runs, between it and the rocks."

"Yes."

"Well, old Man-well's story is that the very first day he got there, he saw the gal, and he was so struck with her beauty that he didn't do a thing but try tuh see her again, and the long and short of it was that he sneaked around to the butte side uh the house and climbed up a path he found among the rocks, until he found a nice quiet place where he could sit and roll cigarettes and smoke 'em 'thout being seen; *and* he hadn't sat there more'n a thousand years before he saw the gal."

"Go on."

"There is a small balcony in front uh one uh the windows uh her room, and Manuel told me as how she is in the habit uh spendin' certain parts uh each afternoon a-sunnin' herself on it; *and* seein' as how his hidin'-place ain't more'n fifty feet from the balcony in a straight line, I reckoned that he had a sure good chance uh ropin' the situation."

"He certainly should have obtained a fairly good view of the young woman."

"Manuel told me how to find the spot, and so I rode away to look for it."

"And you found it and saw the girl, eh?"

"I sure did, Nick—and it's a holy wonder that I'm back again at Double-O. As it is, I'm plumb sure that I was so heeled by the sight uh her that I didn't move from that spot for uh solid hour after she left the balcony."

"I wish you would get down to facts, Bud, if you please."

"There's facts a-plenty, you bet! First off, I rides up tuh the west side uh the butte, tuh a place where I knows there was a fissure in the rocks through which I could make my way unobserved to the other side; *and* I takes the saddle and bridle off'n Coyote—that's one uh my mounts—and turns him loose."

"And you found the place which Manuel had made use of, eh?"

"I sure did, Nick."

"And saw the girl?"

"Uh-huh!" and Bud lapsed into a dreamy state, from which Nick had to rouse him before he would proceed with his story.

"I sure had about given up seein' her when she stepped out onto the balcony with a camp-stool in her hand and she sets down there with some sort uh fancy work in her two hands; and then my jaw dropped and my eyes popped and I went plumb loco for an hour or so. Nick, in the course uh this lifetime uh mine I've sure seen some handsome wimmin. I've seen señoritas, *and* madamoiselles, *and* misses till yeh couldn't rest, but that there young woman is sure the queen uh the bunch. That's all. That's the hull story, Nick."

"It only gives proof of what we knew before," said Nick. "It tells us nothing more than the fact that she is there in that house."

"Well, mebby that's true—and then mebby it ain't."

"It gave you an idea, I suppose?"

"It sure did that, Nick."

"What was the idea?"

"Mebby yeh noticed that I said the place on the rocks where I was hidden ain't more'n fifty feet from that balcony?"

"I did."

"I can throw a loop farther than that, Nick; and so can Ted—or any one of us, for that matter."

Nick started; then he smiled.

"I see the point, Bud," he said. "It is strange that I did not see it sooner, for it isn't but a short time since I entered a castle in Germany by that very method. I thought then that I was through with castles, but it seems that this Loco Juan has imported a few ancient ideas upon which he has erected his home in Montana. Your scheme is to rope the balcony, isn't it?"

"*Pre*cisely."

"And then walk the rope, hand over hand, across the ditch from the rocks to the balcony?"

"*E*xactly."

"And so, get to the girl; eh?"

"*De*cidedly."

"What is the temperature of that water in the ditch, Bud?"

"I'm only guessin', but I should say that it's about 'leven thousand in the shade."

"If you were doing the hand-over-hand act across the rope, and should happen to drop into the water, it would be warm, wouldn't it, Bud?"

"Well, Nick, since yeh ask the question I don't mind answerin' it. It's my opinion that if you was tumbled

into that water and should by any chance roll out of it into hell-fire, you would think that you'd tumbled up against an iceberg by contrast. Oh, it's hot, all right; but that fact wouldn't cast any prospectuses in the way uh my crossin' the rope if it was there, across the ditch, with me at one end and the gal at the other."

"The idea is not a bad one at all; but there are two or three necessary conditions that should go with it, Bud."

"I've thought of a few myself, Nick."

"The first one is, does the girl wish to be rescued?"

"Well, by the Lord Harry, if I ever thought uh that! S'posen she don't; what then?"

"I'll answer that question after a moment. The second condition is, no matter whether she wishes to be rescued or not, is she the girl I am after?"

"I reckon there ain't much doubt as to that."

"No; there is not. The third one is: What is there to be seen on that balcony that you could throw a loop over, and if there is such a thing there, is it strong enough to hold my weight? I'm no lobster, Bud, to be plunged alive into water that is about 312 degrees Fahrenheit."

"That is the only hitch in the hull business, Nick."

"What is—that I'm not a lobster?"

"Well, that ain't exactly what I mean; but I want to say right here that if you should come face to face with that gal without expecting it, I'll bet you'd turn red enough to be mistook for one. What I started to say was that there ain't any such place on that balcony. I couldn't see so much as a flyspeck that a feller could rope with his riata; *and* so I thought out another scheme."

"What was it, Bud? You seem to be prolific of ideas to-day."

"I hope that ain't nothin' insultin' that you said, Nick. When I was a kid I used to know how to make bows and to shoot arrows pretty straight, and I was wonderin' if it wouldn't be a good scheme for me to make a bow and a few arrows, and so open a correspondence with the young woman. I could tie a note to one of the arrows and shoot it over to her, and if she liked what it said, she could wave her hand, or do something to let us know about it. Then, if she did like it, we could shoot over a string, and by makin' it into a loop, we could haul it one way and t'other to beat the band. *Then*, if she did like the game, she could ask for a hull stack uh chips by ketchin' the rope herself—*and* the rest would be easy."

"Your scheme is a good one, Bud, *if the girl happens to wish to be rescued from that man and his house, it would be fatal otherwise.*"

"I'm onto that fact all right, good and plenty."

Nick smoked on in silence for a considerable time; but at last he said:

"I'll tell you what I think we will do, Bud."

"All right. What is it?"

"I will consult with Ted, first; but, anyhow, we will ride over there where you went, and we will go in time to-morrow afternoon to see the girl when she comes out on the balcony. The three of us will study the situation, and after that we will decide what to do. Only I want to tell you this: I have been revolving a plan in my own head that I think is better, and it may be that I will find it a good idea to try both of them at the same time—yours and mine; Bud."

"Good, Nick! All the same, I'll bet you even that my plan works the best."

"I wouldn't give much for it—or you, either—if you did not think so," said Nick.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S PERFECT DISGUISE.

Somewhat later that same evening, when Nick and Ted, with five of Ted Strong's outfit, were seated together in the big living-room of the ranch-house, the detective, after announcing that he would return in a few moments, and that he was going to hold a short interview with Manuel, the Mexican, arose and left them.

It was almost half an hour later when the door through which he had departed opened suddenly and Manuel entered the room, walking as upright and as firmly as if his leg had never been broken; as if he had sustained no injury of any sort from the accident at the water-tower.

Every one in the room, with the exception of Ted Strong, started to his feet, and then subsided again upon their chairs; all save Bud Morgan, who stood still where he had risen, and after moistening his lips with his tongue, muttered half aloud:

"I'll be eternally doggoned if that greaser ain't been stringin' us from the send-off! *And* ain't he got a gall like a buffalo bull to walk in here among us like that?" After which he sank into his chair, speechless as far as further utterance was concerned.

The Mexican paused when he was half-way between the doorway and the group of men, and with the ghost of a crafty smile on his face, and speaking in the Spanish tongue, he said:

"Where is the señor who rescued me from the fire? Will somebody reply to me in Spanish? I can make myself understood the better so."

"We ain't answerin' no questions, mister," Bud blurted out, in English, before anybody else had a chance to speak. "We're goin' to ask a few, however. Where is that there busted leg uh your'n; eh?"

"I left it up-stairs," was the calm reply, again in Spanish. "It was made of wood, anyhow; and I have fixed up another one."

"Well, I'll be doggoned!" muttered Bud.

"If the señors will permit, I will return to the castle

by the butte," said the Mexican, again showing his teeth in that crafty smile which Bud Morgan seemed particularly to dislike.

By way of reply to this suggestion, Bud leaped to his feet, and with one bound passed the Mexican and stood between him and the door by which he had entered.

Then, with calm deliberation, he raised his revolver and pointed it directly at the Mexican's heart.

"I reckon, Mister Greaser, that you ain't a-doin' any such 'tarnal thing just at present," he said, with cold decision. "Yeh've got the space uh time durin' which I can count ten to give the password, which means that you'll kindly explain to this meetin' how in blazes yeh walked down here without crutches; *and*, secondly, how yeh walked at all. Now, mister, unwind."

The Mexican's reply was the most amazing thing that Bud remembered to have seen, for the supposed Manuel wheeled in his tracks, turned his back upon Bud, and so faced the others in the room, and then in the plainest English, and with the voice of Nick Carter, he said:

"I ought to pass muster rather well in this rig, Ted; don't you think so?"

"I think it is out of sight," was the calm reply from the young ranchman; and the remark was followed by a general laugh from all, while Bud subsided suddenly into a convenient chair, swearing softly to himself, and calling himself all sorts of names that aren't mentionable here, but all the time with a broad grin of unmixed pleasure on his weather-beaten countenance.

"I suppose you caught on from the first, didn't you, Ted?" asked Nick, as he also dropped into a chair.

"No, Nick. I'll do you credit. I didn't catch on because of any fault in the disguise. I did remember at once that I had heard of your doing that sort of thing time after time, and I also knew that Manuel himself could not have walked into the room in that manner, if his life depended upon the act. So, of course, I knew it was you."

"What do you think of it, Bud?" asked Nick, wheeling around.

"I'm not thinkin' just at present. I lost my thinker five minutes ago. Holy smoke, Nick! you sure are the cream of the crater! You sure are!"

"Are you wise to that other plan of mine, Bud?"

"Why, I suppose you're figgerin' on makin' your escape from this ranch about now, eh? And stealin' a mount, eh? And— "

"Wait a moment, Bud," said Ted, raising one hand for silence. Then, to Nick, he added:

"It is a good plan, all right, if it will work," he said. "And there is no doubt that it will work all right, too, so far as the disguise and the imitation of Manuel's voice are concerned; but there is one thing about it which possibly you have forgotten, Nick."

"I don't think so, Ted; but what is it?"

"First, Manuel's friends abandoned him to his fate, to be burned with you at the tower."

The detective nodded.

"Second, Manuel killed one of them himself and wounded two others, after they had done that; and——"

"Hold on, Ted. Let me interrupt you," said Nick.

"Go ahead."

"It is true that Manuel was abandoned to the fire by his friends, but Manuel can overlook that if he chooses to do so, notwithstanding the fact that he loudly cursed them all for what they did—or failed to do. It is also true that those men do not know that it was Manuel who shot one of them dead and wounded two others. If Manuel were bound and helpless, how could he have done that?"

"That's so."

"What is more natural than that, after the rescue, Manuel should have been brought to Double-O a prisoner, to be pumped dry of all the information he had in his possession? And what is a better continuation of the story than that he should have managed to make his escape? And isn't it only natural that having made his escape he should, being an outlaw, return to his outlaw companions?"

"I see. You are right, Nick. What more?"

"This: I have made up my disguise very carefully; I have used a stain which water will not touch——"

"Unless yeh should happen to find it in that ditch," muttered Bud.

"I'm not going to do that, Bud," said Nick. Then, to Ted, he continued:

"This stain is like the Quaker's smile—it won't come off. I have been practising with Manuel in his room until I have got his voice letter-perfect. I know the names of many of his companions, what he calls them, what he thinks of them, and how they regard him; and he has also given me much more information about the surroundings of the place that will be useful, and will enable me to pass muster among his friends without much danger of discovery.

"Fortunately, he has been a very taciturn chap among them. He has done very little talking. Many of them are afraid of him. He is a Guerreran, remember, and to a Mexican that means much.

"Now, having made up my mind that I can pass muster among them, I am going there to-night. I want a horse from your corral that will carry me all right without saddle or bridle, if you have got such a one. If I go in that manner, it will have a proper effect upon them."

"Right," said Bud, from the background. "Coyote'll do it down to the ground."

"Further," continued Nick; "I want one of the men to ride with me as guide until we come in sight of the butte, after which he shall return and leave me to finish the trip alone."

"That'll be me," whispered Bud, addressing the wall.

"No, it won't," said Nick. "I've got other work for you if you'll hold your jaw for a moment."

"I sure will."

"Now, Ted," continued Nick, "you and I have talked over that plan of Bud's."

"Yes," replied the young ranchman.

"If you will try to carry out just about what we agreed upon in reference to that, and go there with Bud to that place in the rocks near the balcony some time to-morrow afternoon, I have an idea that the rest will be comparatively easy; but the point is this:

"Manuel has never been inside that house, which is called a castle, and I will therefore have a hard time to gain an entrance to it myself."

"I guess there isn't any doubt about that, Nick," said Ted, smiling.

"More, it is impossible to tell when I will succeed in doing it. I may be able to accomplish it to-morrow, and if we look the facts in the eye I must confess that it may take a month to accomplish it. You realize that, Ted?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And I take it, Ted, that you and your outfit, here, are willing to help me out to the end, no matter what that end may be or how long it takes to accomplish it. Am I right about that?"

"It seems to me an unnecessary question to ask; but I will put it to the boys."

There was no need, however, to do that either, and the answering shout testified.

"All right," said Nick, smiling upon them all. "All that remains to say, then, is this: At least one of you should be on the watch among the rocks opposite the balcony, every afternoon, from three o'clock till sunset, from now on until I signal to you from the house, or until the watcher finds a note tucked under one of the rocks in that place."

"That will be done, too."

"And there should be another one of you handy by, so that a messenger can be sent here at any moment without delay."

"That will be done."

"I guess that is all, Ted. You must understand, all of you, that I am working on this case somewhat in the dark. It is eighteen years since that young woman was stolen from her home. She was only five years old at the time. It may be that she has no wish to escape from the power of Loco; it may be that she has been so taught that she will resist our efforts as strenuously as the guard that has been placed around her. *But the fact remains that if she is Carmen Glenn I have promised her father that she shall be taken to him for an interview, at least, whether she desires to go or not.*"

"Which means that if she won't go willingly, you propose to take her, anyhow; is that it?"

"Yes; that is it—after I have satisfied myself that she is the woman I seek."

"It is rather an odd proposition, isn't it, Nick?" asked Ted.

"It is the strangest case, in some respects, that I ever had. I've got to take her to her father, whether she wishes to go or not; and I have also got to take Loco Juan, alive, to him; so no matter what happens, no matter how hard a fight we get into, I do not wish any of you to deliberately injure him beyond recovery."

"I suppose the girl's father wants to preserve him for torture," muttered Bud.

"No," said Nick. "He has no such idea. All that he desires is an opportunity to see his daughter, and to tell her the truth about herself, and to know all the truth concerning her for all these years. After that, she will be permitted to go her way if she chooses."

"But Loco Juan—what does the old fellow want of him if it isn't to torture him?"

"He wants some secrets from him which only Loco can reveal, and he proposes first to get Loco in his power, and then to offer him his liberty in exchange for the knowledge."

"Oh, I see. That wouldn't be a bad trade, either."

"And now," said Nick, "I believe that is all for the present. Manuel has promised to remain hidden in his room until he has my permission to leave it. For the rest, we are all agreed upon the program to be followed."

"We are."

"Then I will start at once. I have got Manuel's weapons, and some of my own, besides. Now, who is to ride with me until we are in sight of the butte?"

Every man in the room leaped to his feet, Ted among them; and Nick laughed aloud.

"I did not expect to ask you to go, Ted," he said; "but, all the same, if you are willing, I wish you would do so."

Ten minutes later they started.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OUTLAW CHIEFTAIN.

"We will ride hard if you don't mind, Ted," said Nick, when they set out for the butte, "because I wish this horse to be about blown when I get there; at least, I want him to look as if I had not tarried by the way."

The consequence of this request was that there was almost no chance at all for conversation during that journey.

The two men rode silently side by side, Nick without saddle or bridle, but being astride of a perfectly trained horse, he did not mind that in the least.

As soon as they came in sight of the butte, they halted, and Ted pointed out the trail to the detective; a moment later they had separated, and while the young ranchman started on his return to Double-O, Nick rode straight ahead toward the stronghold of Loco Juan.

It was after two o'clock in the morning when he rode in among the lesser buildings by which the greater one was flanked.

He could hear the barking of dogs as he approached, and he knew long before he arrived that the people there were astir, wondering, no doubt, who dared to approach that place at such an hour.

He had given no thought to the possible presence of dogs at the place, until that moment, and now it gave him some uneasiness; for well he knew that dogs cannot be deceived by appearances. They use a stronger evidence than that.

Nor had Manuel mentioned the dogs, and so Nick did not know at that moment whether the Guerreran had been friendly with any of them or not.

But he argued to himself that inasmuch as the Guerreran had *not* mentioned the subject, it was because it had no significance for him, and therefore it was supposable that he had not been on terms of intimacy with any of the animals.

And again, Nick was dressed from head to foot in Manuel's clothing.

"That," he thought, "ought to be sufficient for the scent of the dogs. My being inside of the clothes may puzzle them a little, but—I have got to risk it, anyhow."

So he did not hesitate, but rode steadily forward until he was brought to a sudden halt at the very spot which Manuel had described to him, by a sharp command in Spanish to throw up his hands, or he would be shot.

"*Manos altos!*" came the command; and Nick put his "*manos*" very much "*altos*" without delay; but at the same time he called out:

"*Estoy amigo!* Manuel Primitivo."

It was the voice, the gesture, and the angry snarl of Manuel Primitivo, just as the real Manuel had told him how to use them, and their use had an instant effect.

There was a chorus of laughter from the men, who had been concealed until then; and now they stepped out into the moonlight, calling many questions to him as he approached.

"We thought you were roasted by this time," said one; and there were other jesting remarks, to all of which Nick merely growled his replies, at the same time carrying off the appearance that he was almost dead with fatigue.

As he threw himself from the back of the horse and staggered forward among them, he could hear some expressions of pleasure at the supposed return of Manuel, and at the same time there were other low-toned remarks which were not so complimentary.

To one of these latter, which was uttered rather too loudly, he gave answer; for he wheeled, and, instantly pulling a knife from his belt, he poised it as if ready to throw.

A simultaneous cry from every man there was the result, and the man who had offended fell upon his knees, speechless with fear.

Nick returned the knife to his belt, and smiled coldly. Manuel had told him that he had a reputation among his fellows as a deadly knife-thrower, and he saw now the effect of that reputation.

After a moment of silence, during which he had let his eyes travel slowly from one face to another, he said:

"I have been a captive; I have escaped; I have ridden without saddle or bridle; I have been tortured to make confession of things here; I have returned to tell the chief about it all. I am almost dead with fatigue, but, all the same, I warn you that the first of you who speaks as Abran Plata did just now, I will kill! One of you drive that horse away so that he will return. Somebody may tell the chief that in the morning I have a report to make—after I have rested."

He turned away abruptly and hurried along toward the place where, from the description that had been given him, he knew how to find Manuel's sleeping-place; and the others stood silently by and permitted him to pass.

A dog or two sniffed ominously about his heels, but none offered to interfere with him, and presently he had entered the low building and thrown himself upon the blankets which belonged to Manuel Primitivo.

He knew that three others occupied that same low room with him, and that the three had been among those to welcome his return.

Presently they entered, and one of them came stealthily toward him and, bending over, called in a low tone:

"Manuel, would you like a swallow of tequila?"—Mexican whisky—"I have some here. It will do you good, Manuel."

But Nick made no reply, and the man turned away, and in a low tone whispered to his two companions:

"He is sleeping like the dead."

"Let him sleep," growled another. "He will need to be rested when he talks to the chief in the morning."

"Bah! Manuel is the only one among us who seems not to fear the chief at all."

"Yes. And for that very reason he will die some day. Loco has been told that it was Manuel who fired the bullet that killed——"

"Hush! Not so loud. If he had done that, he would not have returned here."

"Anyhow, he cursed them all roundly, the chief as well

as the others. Consigned them to perdition, and called them foul names. Do you think that Don Juan will forgive that?"

"He will forgive everything if it is to his interests to do so; nothing at all if it is not. He has use for Manuel."

There was a moment of silence, and then the one who had not hitherto spoken said:

"I wonder what it is that he has on his mind to report to Don Juan?"

"Don't you know?" asked another. "Didn't you hear what he said?"

"Yes; that he had been tortured and asked to tell things that he knew about this place, and about the chief; but what of that?"

"How should I know? But the chief will want to hear him, just the same."

The talk ceased then, and presently Nick knew that his companions were sleeping; but he remained awake himself for a long time, turning over in his mind his plans for the campaign he had so auspiciously begun.

His reference to the supposed torture he had undergone and his statement that he had a report to make to the chief in the morning, had both been made with a purpose. He hoped that Juan Santillos would send for him to be conducted before him inside the castle to make that report; and he had concocted a story which had sufficient of the element of truth in it to excite the interest of the strange chief, he thought.

But at last he slept, and when he awoke, the sun was shining outside and he was alone in the stone hut.

When he went outside at last, he found that the men were scattered around the place in groups, and he had no doubt that he was the subject of discussion.

Of this he was presently made aware, for he had no sooner finished his breakfast of black beans than one of the men came to him and announced that the chief wished to see him at once.

"Where is he?" asked Nick, scowling at the messenger.

"Come," was the reply. And the man led him directly toward the huge stone building which had been so appropriately named a castle.

The entrance-door was raised and the bridge across the wide ditch of boiling water was down in place; and at the opposite end of it, standing in an attitude of waiting, was a man whom Nick instantly decided was no other than Loco Juan himself.

Nick's guide halted at the ridge and stepped aside for the detective to pass; which he did without a glance in either direction, or a word; and at the opposite end of the bridge he came to a halt and murmured as he had been instructed by Manuel to do, while he saluted:

"A su disposicion, señor."

Loco Juan smiled, showing two rows of gleaming white teeth; but it was the smile of a wolf and the glare of a poisonous snake in his eyes, although despite it all he was an extraordinarily handsome man. To-day there is a facial expression in Mexico which is known as "the Rubio smile," and this grimace was one of such; dangerous, ominous, menacing, poisonous, terrible. Worse than a frown or even an oath.

"You have returned Manuel mio," said the chief, still smiling.

"Si señor. I am here."

"You have suffered torture at the hands of my enemies, I am told, amigo."

"Si, señor."

"You have been questioned, also; asked to tell all that you know about me."

"Si, señor."

"You have, doubtless, betrayed me, Manuel?"

"Señor knows Manuel better than that," was the calm reply.

"You cursed me, however, there at the tower."

"El señor knows that the fire was hot and that it was coming nearer."

The chief smiled again, and nodded his head.

"You shot at us, trying to kill me—your chief—did you not?"

"No, señor."

He held out his hands as if silently to announce that he had been bound and helpless at the time; at least, the chief so understood it, for he said:

"If your hands were bound, you at least were not gagged; you could curse."

"Si, señor. There were not curses sufficient, at the moment," said Nick calmly, and looking Santillos straight in the eyes. "But now I have returned. I have information. Does the señor care to hear what I have to tell him?"

"Bueno! Come with me. Follow."

Don Juan turned upon his heel and strode away, and, nothing loath, Nick Carter followed, at once realizing that he was now inside the mysteries of that stone castle

and inwardly resolved that he would penetrate some of them ere he went forth again.

For Manuel had told him among other things that none of the outside men were ever permitted to enter there; that when one was taken across the bridge, one of two things inevitably happened to him—either he was never seen again, which meant that he had gone there to his death, or he became from that time on one of the house guards or servants.

If it had been really Manuel himself who had returned there, Nick had no doubt that his fate would have been the former, for the Guerreran had not concealed the idea that he believed himself to be both feared and hated by his chief.

But in the present case Nick had no fear for the outcome of his venture.

He was accustomed to taking great chances, and to venturing into dangerous places, and he realized now that everything depended upon his own diplomacy, his glib tongue, and his powers of resource to meet and counter any emergency that might arise.

And so he followed Santillos into the patio—for the house was built after the Mexican style, with a large, square court in the center of it; and thence, from the court they ascended stairs to an inner gallery which ran around the square, and presently he followed the outlaw into a large, high-ceiled room.

Don Juan pointed toward a chair.

"Sit there, Manuel," he said, "and tell your story."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN WITH THE CREEPY SMILE.

"Now, amigo, what have you to say?" demanded Juan Santillos, after he had lighted a huge, black cigar, and leaned back in his chair preparatory to listening; but appearing a sudden thought came to him, for before Nick could reply, he leaned forward again quickly and pushed the box of cigars toward the supposed Manuel.

"Perhaps, Manuel," he said softly, and with a cooing intonation that suggested the purring of a panther, and at the same time breathing his face in that same dreadful smile, "you would like to smoke while you talk."

Nick was really startled by this suggestion.

He was perfectly familiar with the character of Mexicans such as Santillos, and he knew well that Don Juan would not have accustomed to such familiarity with a person whom he regarded as no better than a peon, unless he had one of two good reasons for doing so.

Either he had already decided that Manuel must die—or he had determined to ask a great favor of some sort from him.

However, Nick accepted the cigar as imperturbably as if the offer of one from his chief were an every-day occurrence; and having lighted it, he also leaned back in the chair he had taken, determined to be as proud and self-contained as he imagined the Guerreran would have become had he actually been forced into the same circumstances.

"Begin at the time you mounted the ladder to the top of the tower," said Don Juan, after the ceremony of lighting the cigar was completed.

And Nick replied as if he were indeed Manuel, reciting his own story.

"I was seized when I reached the top," he said. "A hand was at my throat, preventing me from calling out to give a warning; and then, before I could do much in the way of struggling, I was struck on the head with the butt of a pistol, and I became unconscious."

"We, below, did not know what had become of you," said Santillos.

"No; I suppose not, Don Juan. I did not know myself."

"And then—what then?"

"The next, then, of which I was conscious, was seeing a smooth-faced Americano beside me."

"That young devil whom they call King of the Wild West?" asked Loco.

"No; another than he."

"One of his men, doubtless."

"No, a stranger."

"How do you know that? You are not familiar with the appearance of all who are employed by the hacendero—the ranchman."

"But this was a stranger. I did not know it then; I learned it later on."

"Well?"

"When he saw that my eyes were open, he leaned forward and pulled the gag from my mouth. Then he told me that you had set fire to the tower, and that we would burn together. It was then that I called out to you."

"Like a fool!"

"Sí, señor."

"And loosed your arms like a whelp—"

"No, señor. It was not I who waved his arms; it was the other man."

"Why should he have done that?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders, but ventured no reply to the question.

"Continue with your story," ordered the chief curtly.

"After that there was some firing of pistols. The man told me that one of your men had fallen and that others were hit. Then it became very hot. There was more firing."

"It sounded to me very much as if two men were engaged in that fusillade," said Don Juan, with his shrewd eyes fixed like gimlets on Nick's face.

"Yes," said the detective imperturbably; "I noticed it. It did sound so. And then——" He paused.

"Well? And then—what?"

"Then it became hot up there. The man said that you and the others had withdrawn to a considerable distance and that he was going to jump. It seemed for a moment as if he intended to leave me there to burn, but at last he cut my bonds and told me to follow him. Then he threw out a satchel, which suggested what I now know to be true, that he arrived there on the same train with the ranchero."

"Go on. He threw out his satchel: then he jumped; what then?"

"I jumped also."

"And when you alighted why did you not kill him at once, as you should have done?"

"I was injured. Manuel Primitivo was a prisoner. I was taken away to a hollow in the ground. Later the man ran back again to get his satchel. It was then your turn to shoot him, my chief."

"Go on with your tale, amigo."

"Many hours passed after that; and then came the young ranchero with some of his men, to the rescue; and—what will you?—I was taken to the rancho."

"That was before daylight in the morning?"

"Si, señor."

"And then—— It is now that your tale becomes interesting. What happened to you then, and how did you manage your escape?"

"Ah! How can I tell you—how describe what happened to me then?"

"At least, you can make the effort."

"There were questions—hundreds of them; there was torture—it was frightful; and when I would not gratify them with my answers, the torture was worse. It was frightful. And the questions——"

"What were the questions?"

"They were about you. They were about a señorita which you are supposed by those men to have imprisoned here in the castillo. They even gave the señorita a name that was new to——"

"A name? What name?"

"They referred to her as the Señorita Carmen Glenn."

"Ha! Go on, go on!"

"I heard many things which I could not understand. I was asked many things which I could not have answered if I had chosen to do so."

"Which I have no doubt you would have done had you possessed the necessary information."

"Don Juan Santillos does me an injustice."

"What next? Go on."

"There is nothing more of importance. There were questions about yourself; about the building of the castillo, about the señorita. They talked of her great beauty. They talked of a father who lives somewhere in the East, and they talked about many things."

"What things? Tell me."

"They said that you had stolen the señorita from her father eighteen years ago and had kept her a prisoner ever since that time. They said that you had been cruel to her; that you were her cousin; that you had stolen her property; that you still held what did not belong to you; they said that you were to be captured and taken to the East, but for what purpose I know not."

"Oh, they said that, did they?"

"Si, señor; and more."

"What more?"

"They are also to take the señorita to the East, where she is to be restored to her father, who is now a cripple."

"So; that is the game. Who was it who said all these things?"

"The man to whom I have referred as a stranger."

"And who is he? Did you find that out?"

"Si, señor."

"Who is he, then? Tell me that."

"He is a detective from New York, señor."

"A detective. What is his name?"

"Carter. They called him Nick."

"Nick Carter? The devil!"

"Si, señor."

"And was it Nick Carter whom I had imprisoned on that water-tower with you, amigo?"

"*Si señor;* no other."

"Oh, man, if I had known it! If I had but known it at the time!"

"You would have captured him, señor?"

"I would have—— Never mind what I would have done. It is too late now to talk about it. But——"

"But you will capture him yet, señor?"

"You are to answer questions; not to ask them, hombre!"

"*Si, señor.*"

"What more is there to tell?"

"Nothing more, señor."

"How did you escape?"

"They did not bind me. I made my way out of the house after I had found my arms—my weapons. I rode from there here on a horse without saddle or bridle. I arrived——"

"Yes. I know all that."

"*Si, señor.*"

"How much of this tale that you have related to me did you tell to your friends outside? Answer me that."

"None of it."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I have told nobody. I reserved my information for you, señor."

"It is well that you did so; as it is you know rather too much."

"But I can be trusted with the knowledge, señor."

"I am not so sure of that."

"It is true, nevertheless."

Loco Juan cast aside his half-smoked cigar and lighted a fresh one, and after that for a long time he remained buried in thought, as if he were deciding a momentous question.

Presently he raised his eyes and fixed them piercingly upon the detective's face, and then again Nick saw that dreadful smile of his, which had such an ominous look.

"Manuel mio," he said softly, "how shall I reward you?"

Unconsciously a shiver crept down Nick's spine. In that instant he realized that Don Juan Santillos intended to [illegible] the life of the man he supposed to be [illegible] Primitivo: and also in that instant Nick determined upon a plan which had occurred to him since entering that room, which was almost impossible, but which appeared now to be the only course to pursue. But he replied to the question.

"Your favor, my chief, is all that I seek," he said.

Again the smile.

"Surely you know that you have that. Come with me. I have a present that I would bestow upon you. Come."

Loco Juan left his chair and crossed to the door. Then, stepping back, he motioned to Nick to precede him.

But Nick hung back. He knew that it would be decidedly unsafe for him to walk in advance of Santillos, and besides there were other reasons why he wished to walk in the rear himself.

There was an instant of hesitation on the part of the outlaw, and then, as if he feared to rouse the suspicions of Manuel, he shrugged his shoulders and passed out upon the gallery of the patio, again bidding Nick to follow him.

CHAPTER XI.

A HOT-WATER TRAP.

They made almost the circuit of the house and descended the stairs again to the ground floor.

Here they crossed the patio to the opposite side, and in doing that Nick had an opportunity to discover that since he had entered the house the gate had been closed again, and that the bridge was probably drawn up, thus shutting the house off from the outside world.

He and Loco might have been utterly alone in the great house, if the appearance of things was to be taken as a criterion. Nick had not seen a sign of another human being inside the house since he entered it, although he was satisfied that many were there in reality.

Doubtless they kept severely to their own quarters, and only appeared when summoned by the chieftain.

Presently, from the floor of the patio, they entered a large, square room not unlike the one where the interview had taken place, save that the other had been doorless with the exception of the entrance from the patio, while this one contained a door at the opposite side.

True, it was closed now, but as soon as they had entered the room, Loco pointed toward that door, and with that same oily smile of his, he said softly:

"Beyond that door, Manuel mio, I keep my treasure."

"Is it so, señor?" exclaimed Nick, with affected interest, but all the time watching his companion narrowly.

"Yes; it is so. I have brought you here to show you the treasure, and to give you something out of it."

"Ah!" said Nick.

He made as if to step toward the door eagerly, as if anxious to discover what was at the other side of it; but Santillos interposed his body in the way.

"Wait," he said. "The sight of so much treasure coming suddenly upon you will dazzle you, my Manuel. Shall I tell you about it before you enter that room?"

"*Si, señor.* If you will be so good."

That wicked smile again clouded rather than illumined the face of the outlaw.

"Listen," he said. "Beyond that door there is gold enough to ransom a king. It is piled upon the floor in bright American eagles and double eagles. You know what they are?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Now, if I let you enter, it must be in accordance with my rules."

"Of course, señor."

"Look; here is the key. Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"It fits the lock of the door, but if you will look that way you will see that there is no keyhole in sight. Do you observe that much?"

"I do."

"I place the key in your grasp so that you may be assured it is in your possession. Next I blindfold you tightly and then I turn you about several times. Then, when I release you, you start forward in search of the door—and I warn you that it will not be easy to find."

Nick laughed aloud, as if the story he heard were alluring.

"I shall find it easily enough," he exclaimed.

"Do you think so? You shall try; for when you have found it and have succeeded in unlocking the door, it is your privilege to rush inside and to bring away with you all the gold that you can secure in two minutes of time. You understand?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"And now are you ready to make the attempt?"

"*Si, señor.*"

With careful precision, Santillos took a handkerchief from one of his pockets, and having snapped it in the air twice, he stepped toward the detective.

Nick stood with his own hands behind him, bending slightly forward as if to receive the bandage over his eyes; and then, as Loco Juan raised his own hands with the handkerchief held between them ready to fix in place, Nick suddenly darted forward with his arms, and his strong fingers closed with a grip of steel around the Spaniard's throat.

For a moment there was a frightful struggle, for Don Juan proved to be infinitely stronger than Nick had ever supposed him to be.

Nevertheless, strong as he was, he could not resist that attack, nor could he make the slightest sound to call out for assistance.

The terrible muscular strength of Nick Carter's fingers pressed against his neck and throat, shutting off his breath and his powers of resistance at the same time, and although he struggled with all his strength, although he writhed and twisted and squirmed in a mad effort to free himself, it was without avail, and gradually he succumbed to the attack, until at last he hung, a quivering heap of flesh, in Nick Carter's arms.

Nick saw at a glance that the outlaw chieftain was insensible, and so he dropped him to the floor and stood above him for a moment, turning over in his mind what he had best do next.

With the handkerchief, with which the detective was to have been blindfolded, Nick gagged Santillos thoroughly, and then, having discovered some picture-cords in the room, with which he bound him so that he could not escape, he straightened up and viewed his work.

"I strongly suspect what is on the other side of that door, through which you expected me to rush to my death," he said in a low tone, speaking as if the man on the floor were not for the moment beyond the power of hearing. "I have already realized that this room is much warmer than it should be, and unless I am mistaken—but I will look."

With the key in his hand he approached the door. The keyhole was not difficult to find, notwithstanding what Santillos had said about it, and after a moment Nick pushed the door open into the space beyond it.

He started back then, in some dismay, for a volume of steam rushed into the room where he was standing and it was so hot that it almost scalded him.

"So," said the detective, pulling the door shut again and turning toward the prostrate figure on the floor which was now staring at him with widely distended eyes, "that is how you rid yourself of your enemies, is it? Brrr!"

Suddenly he bethought himself.

Here, at his mercy, was the man who held the secrets he wished to discover; there, directly at hand, was a door which opened upon the ditch of boiling water which flowed around the castle.

With a grim smile on his face he approached Santillos, and recalling the fact that the outlaw was not aware that he was not the Manuel Primitivo he appeared to be, he scowled down upon him, and in Manuel's voice he asked in Spanish:

"Don Juan Santillos, have you any argument to make why I should not pitch you into the hot water?"

Santillos could not reply, by reason of the gag that silenced his tongue.

Then Nick, still with the outward air of the man he represented himself to be, strode to the door again and pushed it open, and while the steam rushed into the room, he returned to the side of the helpless man and raised him from the floor.

The Spaniard was too terrified to struggle. He hung limply in the grasp of the detective, and there was no doubt that he expected at that minute to be cast bodily into the boiling inferno of the ditch.

But as the detective drew near to the door, he paused and again put down his burden.

"Don Juan," he said in English, "I am not Manuel Primitivo; I am Nick Carter. I was not aware of the fact that you knew me until a little while ago, when Manuel I happened to mention my own name. But you appeared at that time to know who I am. Do you? Nod your head if you do."

The outlaw replied as directed to do.

"Very good," said Nick. "If you know me or know anything at all about me, you should be quite well aware of the fact that I am one of the men in the world who mean what they say."

Again the outlaw nodded.

"That being the case, hear what I have to say now."

Another nod.

"Yonder door is open and the hot water is handy. You know better than I do just how hot it is and how you would feel if you were suddenly pitched into it; don't you?"

Still another nod.

"Now, I am about to loosen the gag so that you can speak, but I warn you if you utter a sound that could be heard by a person listening at the other side of the opposite door, I will that instant throw you into the ditch. Don't make any mistake about that."

He loosened the gag somewhat, without entirely removing it.

"Now, I am ready," he said sternly. "I want a few questions answered. I shall ask them and you will reply. If you refuse to answer, and if I discover that you are lying, into the hot water you go. Is that sufficiently plain?"

"Yes."

"I am not quite sure that I shall not drop you through that door, anyhow. It all depends upon you and your replies to my questions. If you answer readily and if you tell the truth, I may conclude not to do so. It all depends upon yourself."

"I will answer."

"See that you do so. Where is Carmen Glenn?"

"She is here; in this house."

"Oh, I knew that. Whereabouts in the house is she?"

"In a room at the northwest corner; a room — "

"I was aware of that fact also, so you see how foolish it will be for you to attempt to deceive me."

"Yes. I shall not make such an attempt."

"You are wise. You are the man who stole her, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Eighteen years ago."

"Yes."

"What relation does she bear to you now?"

"None; save that of a prisoner?"

"Is she a willing prisoner?"

For an instant the eyes of the outlaw gleamed wickedly, as if he would have liked to tell something that was not wholly the truth; but a significant glance toward the open door convinced him that it would be utter folly to do such a thing, and he replied:

"No."

"Does she know who she is?"

"Yes. Once in a fit of anger I told her the whole story. Since that time she has hated me. She always disliked and distrusted me, even when I did the most for her; but after that—she has twice tried to stab me since then."

"Does she know that her father is alive?"

"Yes. I told of that, also."

"Now, have you ever wronged her in any way other than stealing her from her home and keeping her a prisoner all these years?"

"She has not been a prisoner. She——"

"Answer my question! Has the girl been wronged in any way by you or by anybody, other than I have said?"

"No. I swear it!"

"And isn't it true that those fabulous mines of yours in Guerrera belong to her, through her mother's family?"

"Yes."

"Well, the time for you to make restitution has come. You are my prisoner, Santillos, and now I propose to make a very important use of you."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUE.

The detective's first act after that was to direct the outlaw chieftain to divest himself of his outer clothing, while he himself did the same with the costume he had borrowed of Manuel; but while they were both so engaged, Nick stood at the opposite side of the room with his weapons within easy reach while he had deprived Santillos of all that he possessed.

That done, they exchanged garments; and presently it appeared as if they had also exchanged personalities, for after again binding his prisoner so that he could not resist, Nick made his face up so exactly in imitation of Primitivo's that it appeared for the time as if there were actually two Manuels in the room.

But it did not long remain so.

With the paraphernalia that the detective had brought with him, he manufactured for himself a small mustache in exact imitation of Santillos', and having attached it to his lip and trimmed it to the requisite shape, he added other touches here and there, and did them so deftly that in a few moments their positions were exactly changed.

Loco Juan Santillos was now, to all appearance, Manuel Primitivo, and Nick, who had formerly been the Guerreran, was now, to an observer, unmistakably the outlaw chieftain.

He even borrowed that wolfish smile for the occasion, and with it shining menacingly upon his face, he told Santillos that if he made a move to attempt to escape he would show him no mercy whatever.

"If you think of your position a moment," he said, in conclusion, "you will see how useless it would be for you to make the effort. The men to whom you might appeal would believe you to be Manuel no matter what you might say or do to the contrary; and they would obey each order of mine as the latter, believing me to be you. If I should order them to throw you into the boiling ditch, do you think they would hesitate to obey?"

"No."

"It is well. I see you are getting a little understanding into that crazy head of yours. Now, we will first close that door into the ditch. So. That is right.

"Now, if you please, you will open the door into the patio, and after that you will lead the way to the room that is occupied by Carmen Glenn. The key, I suppose, is in one of the pockets of this suit I have on; no?"

"Yes."

"Lead on, then. Don't forget the cautions I have given you. To forget them would be for you to court instant death."

Thus they took up the march.

They crossed the patio, ascended the stairs to the gallery, passed along that and through a corridor to a second patio, and thence to a third, where there was a third story to the building.

Here they mounted to another gallery which they traversed, and presently approached a heavy door that was set into the walls of stone at the northwest corner of the building; and here Santillos came to a halt.

"That is the door to her room," said the outlaw, pausing and pointing toward it.

"Very good," replied Nick. "Knock upon it."

Santillos obeyed, but received no response. He rapped a second time, and still there was silence.

"Something has happened," he exclaimed, and Nick saw by the expression of his face that he was in earnest in what he said. "She has never failed to reply to my summons before."

"Here is the key," said the detective, giving it to him. "Open the door and enter."

In a moment the lock was turned and the door was thrown open, but silence met them as before, and a glance told them both that the big, square room was not tenanted.

But one of the long French windows which extended to the floor stood wide open, and Nick pushed his companion forward to that, for he had no wish to permit the outlaw to get behind him, even for a moment.

The balcony upon which the window opened was also unoccupied, and just as Nick was about to push the don outside upon it and then follow himself, to investigate farther, the spiteful spat of a bullet against the stone wall near them, and the sharp report of a revolver, made them both dodge back out of sight into the room again.

Then Nick peered forth rather carefully, and what he saw made him chuckle with silent laughter.

He saw that he had arrived upon the scene just in time to be too late to rescue the young woman himself;

he saw that Ted Strong and Bud Morgan had got ahead of him in that particular, for at that very instant Ted was climbing out of sight up the steep bank of the butte with Carmen Glenn in his arms, while Bud was waiting near at hand, with a revolver in either hand, prepared to puncture the first head that showed itself to interfere with their retreat.

And Nick laughed again; for he remembered at that instant that if he did show himself, Bud would undoubtedly shoot him; for did he not look exactly as if he were the outlaw chief in person?

"Hello, there, Bud!" he called out, in his own natural voice, "what are you shooting at?"

"I'm sure shootin' at the first head that shows up, mister," drawled Bud in reply. "You can't fool me, Loco, by imitating a voice. Keep your head out of sight, or I'll make a hole in it."

"I'll meet you at the ranch, Bud," called Nick, laughing again, in spite of himself.

"All right, mister. Come along. I'll have a rope ready for you, and plenty of hands to haul on it."

He turned then, and, with a bound, disappeared from view.

Fastened to the railing of the balcony, and with the other end of it drifting in the hot water below, was a strong network of heavy cord, such as trapeze performers use to catch them when they fall. How it came there Nick had no idea at that moment, but that it had been the means of conveying Carmen Glenn safely to the bank of the butte he was sure.

"You seem to have arrived rather too late," said the outlaw, trying to smile; but Nick turned on him quickly.

"Understand once for all, Loco," he said, "that I will hold no conversation with you other than is absolutely necessary. Carmen has been rescued by another part of the plan that was agreed upon between my friends and myself, before I came here. It saves her the added danger of being obliged to run the gantlet of your men. We will now do that alone, and remember, if you make a move that I do not like I will either shoot you where you stand, or I will direct them to throw you into the ditch. Now come."

They left the room as they had entered it; and when they had gained the patio below, Nick having received instructions from the outlaw how to order the gate opened, and the bridge lowered into place, gave the proper directions.

He spoke with a voice, acted with the manner, and used the gesticulations of the outlaw chief, while beside him appeared to stand the Guerreran, Manuel.

There was not one among the men who stood respectfully around them who had an idea that the scene was otherwise than as it appeared to be; and when Nick uttered the order that his favorite horse be brought, and that Manuel's horse was also wanted, the two were brought to them without delay.

There was one man from the group who stepped forward and asked if he was not wanted to accompany them; but Nick waved him back again.

And then, as they started to ride away, he half-turned in his saddle and said:

"I may be absent for some time, but I shall send Manuel back here, and during my absence he will act as your chief. If I hear that there is one of you who refuses to obey him absolutely, it will be worse for that man. Remember, Manuel Primitivo is to be your chief until my return, with power as absolute as my own."

And then the two men rode away, side by side, presently disappearing from view from the castle, around a headland of the butte.

"You are going to treat me generously, I see," said Santillos, when they were out upon the plain. "I thank you."

"How is that?" asked Nick. "I do not understand."

"Did you not say that you would send Manuel back again, as their chief?"

"Yes."

"Am I not Manuel, now?"

"No. You are what you always were, and I suspect always will be—a scoundrel. As for Manuel, he is at Mr. Strong's ranch, awaiting our return. I shall send him here to reform that crew of yours and to turn your robbers into vaqueros. As for you—*You are going to New York with me to see a certain Richard Glenn.*"

"Great Heaven! Would you take me there—to him?"

"Yes."

"He will murder me, señor.

"It would serve you right if he did; but he won't. He will ask you some questions and let you go again, more is the pity."

* * * * * * *

At the ranch Nick found Ted and the others awaiting his possible return, and really on the point of riding over

to the castle to ask for Manuel Primitivo, to tell him that the rescue had already been accomplished; and as a matter of fact they came near to using Nick rather harshly before they discovered his identity under the disguise as the outlaw chief.

And then Ted Strong explained how the rescue had happened as it did.

Before he and Bud started out for the butte, Ted recalled the fact that there was such a net as has been described on the ranch, and they took it with them. It was one that had been rescued from the wreck of a circus that had dared to penetrate to that locality once, and now it came in rather handy.

"When we arrived on the scene," said Ted, in explaining it to Nick, "the young woman was on the balcony and saw us before we could get out of sight. She called to us, and then she told us who she was and begged us to rescue her."

"I begin to understand," replied Nick. "The rest was easy."

"Yes. She caught one end of a rope that Bud threw to her. With that she pulled over to her one end of the net; and—well, I went across and got her."

There need be said nothing here about the manner in which that young woman thanked all who were concerned in her rescue. It is sufficient to state that ultimately she was restored to her father, whom she had not seen since she was five years old.

And Señor Don Juan Santillos? Loco Juan? He accompanied Nick also to see that father, and was ultimately dismissed by him; but of the things that happened in connection with him afterward—that is another story.

THE END.

The next number, 526, of this weekly will be "A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

We receive numbers of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine complete catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY
AT 10 CENTS

150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.

MEDAL LIBRARY
AT 10 CENTS

292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.
368—Frank Merriwell's Generosity.
371—Frank Merriwell's Tricks.
374—Frank Merriwell's Temptation.
377—Frank Merriwell on Top.

AT 15 CENTS. (increased Size)

380—Frank Merriwell's Luck.
383—Frank Merriwell's Mascot.
386—Frank Merriwell's Reward.
389—Frank Merriwell's Phantom.

STREET & SMITH, *Publishers*, NEW YORK CITY

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

505—The Man of Many Faces; or, Nick Carter Behind the Scenes.
506—A Letter From the Dead; or, Nick Carter's Proudest Moment.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook; or, Nick Carter's Amazing Experiment.
508—The Gentleman Crook's Last Act; or, Nick Carter and the Haunted House.
509—The "Skidoo" of the K. U. & T.; or, Nick Carter's Great Train Robbery Case.
510—The Last of the Outlaws; or, How Nick Carter Stopped the "Cannon-ball."
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery; or, The Secret of the Green Automobile.
512—A Battle of Wits; or, Nick Carter's Fight for Life.
513—A Game of Five Millions; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Fiend.
514—Codman the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Strangest Experience.
515—The Plot of the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Hairbreadth Escape.
516—The Mechanical Giant; or, Ten-Ichi Plays a Lone Hand.
517—Doris, the Unknown; or, Nick Carter's Blindfold Mystery.
518—A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight.
520—An Automobile Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Bloodhound on the Scent.
521—The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case.
522—The White Arm of a Woman; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Chase.
523—The Man in the Doorway; or, Nick Carter's Conquest of a Castle.
524—The Plot of the Baron; or, Nick Carter's Telling Strategy.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise.
526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motorboat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

ISSUED EVERY TUESDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Buffalo Bill wins his way into the heart of every one who reads these strong stories of stirring adventure on the wide prairies of the West.

Boys, if you want tales of the West that are drawn true to life, do not pass these by.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

278—Buffalo Bill's Daring Plunge; or, The Grisly Ghost of Mahoe.
279—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Mission; or, The Round-up in Hidden Valley.
280—Buffalo Bill's Ghost Raid; or, Hot Times at Bubble Pricking.
281—Buffalo Bill's Traitor Guide; or, The Vengeance of Alkali Pete.
282—Buffalo Bill's Camp-fires; or, The Bad Man of Snake River Crossing.
283—Buffalo Bill Up a Stump; or, The Pawnee Faker of the Bitter Root.
284—Buffalo Bill's Secret Foe; or, The Wizard of Windy Gulch.
285—Buffalo Bill's Master-stroke; or, The Specter of Death Valley.
286—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Mystery; or, Teton John, the Half-breed.
287—Buffalo Bill and the Brazos Terror; or, The Lone Star Outlaws.
288—Buffalo Bill's Dance of Death; or, The Night Hawks of Snake River.
289—Buffalo Bill and the Creeping Terror; or, The Black Spider of the Shoshones.
290—Buffalo Bill and the Brand of Cain; or, The Wandering Jew of the Plains.
291—Buffalo Bill and the Mad Millionaire; or, The Redskin Rovers.
292—Buffalo Bill's Medicine-lodge; or, The White Queen of the Kickapoos.
293—Buffalo Bill in Peril; or, The Red Amazons of the Niobrarah.
294—Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Wolfer Joe on the War-path.
295—Buffalo Bill in the Death Desert; or, The Worship of the Phantom Flower.
296—Buffalo Bill in No Man's Land; or, The Sky-mirror of the Panhandle.
297—Buffalo Bill's Border Ruffians; or, The Desperate Game of Panther Pete.
298—Buffalo Bill's Black Eagles; or, The Snake-master from Timbuctoo.
299—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Dozen; or, The Raiders of Round-Robin Ranch.
300—Buffalo Bill's Rival; or, The Scalp-hunter of the Niobrarah.
301—Buffalo Bill's Ice Chase; or, The Trail of the Black Rifle.
302—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Bugler; or, The White Flower of Fetterman Prairie.
303—Buffalo Bill and the White Specter; or, The Mysterious Medicine-man of Spirit Lake.
304—Buffalo Bill's Death Defiance; or, The Bad Men of Timber Bar.
305—Buffalo Bill and the Barge Bandits; or, The Demon of Wolf River Cañon.
306—Buffalo Bill, the Desert Hotspur; or, Pizen Jane, of Cinnabar.
307—Buffalo Bill's Wild Range Riders; or, The Vengeance of Crazy Snake.
308—Buffalo Bill's Whirlwind Chase; or, The Mustang Catchers of Bitter Water.
309—Buffalo Bill's Red Retribution; or, The Raid of the Dancing Dervishes.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

BRAVE AND BOLD

ISSUED EVERY WEDNESDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

There are a large number of boys to whom stories about the same characters, week after week, become monotonous. It was to suit these fellows that we published BRAVE AND BOLD.

Each story is full 30,000 words in length and is complete in itself, having no connection with any that went before or will come after. Don't miss these.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

187—Chip Conway's White Clue; or, Trailing the Diamond Lifters. By Inspector Robert Barnes.
188—Tracked Across Europe; or, The Clue of the Moving Pictures. By Lawrence White, Jr.
189—Cool Colorado; or, A Cowboy's Fight for Fortune. By Albert W. Aiken.
190—Captain Mystery; or, The Brave Girl of Boulder Bar. By Herbert Bellwood.
191—Silver Sallie; or, The Three Queer Pards of Poker Pocket. By J. C. Cowdriek.
192—The Ranch Raiders; or, Secret of the Golden Dagger. By Capt. Hal Hazelton.
193—A Baptism of Fire; or, At the Front With the Japs. By Mark Darran.
194—The Border Nomad; or, Sharper Stokes' Double Deal. By Herbert Bellwood.
195—Mark Mallory's Struggle; or, Friends and Foes At West Point. By Lieut. Fred Garrison, U. S. A.
196—A Strange Clue; or, The Sharks and Sharps of New York. By James Fisk.
197—Ranch Bob; or, The Boy Sleuth of Kansas. By Richard Traill.
198—The Electric Wizard; or, Through Air and Water to the Pole. By Emerson Bell.
199—Bob, the Shadow; or, Solving a Double Mystery. By Richard Hackstoff.
200—Young Giants of the Gridiron; or, Fighting For the Football Pennant. By Frank Merriwell.
201—Dick Ellis, the Nighthawk Reporter; or, The Biggest News "Beat" on Record. By Robert Reid.
202—Pete, the Breaker Boy; or, The Young Coal Mine Ferret. By Richard Hackstaff.
203—Young Maverick, the Boy From Nowhere; or, The Tenderfoot Oil King of Texas. By Sam Rusher.
204—Tom, the Mystery Boy; or, Trailed By a Secret Shadow. By Robert Reid.
205—Footlight Phil; or, From Call-boy to Star. By Manager Henry Abbott.
206—The Sky Smugglers; or, Gordon Keith's Great Balloon Chase. By Lawrence White, Jr.
207—Bart Benner's Mine; or, The Boy Who Got There. By Lieut. Lionel Lounsberry.
208—The Young Ranchman; or, Bart Benner Going It Alone. By the author of "Bart Benner's Mine."
209—Bart Benner's Cowboy Days; or, The Young Hunter of the Big Horn. By the author of "Bart Benner's Mine."
210—Gordon Keith in Java; or, The Search for the Lost Wild Animal Taker. By Lawrence White, Jr.
211—Ned Hawley's Fortune; or, Lost in the Heart of New York. By Herbert Bellwood.
212—Under False Colors; or, Dick Dangerfield's Mystery. By Police Captain Manning.
213—Bags, the Boy Detective; or, Following a Warm Trail. By Richard Hackstaff.
214—On the Pampas; or, A Strange Chase Across South America. By Lawrence White, Jr.
215—The Crimson Clue; or, Dick Dangerfield's Mission. By Police Captain Manning.
216—At the Red Horse; or, Herr Driesbach, the Lion King. By Charles H. Day.
217—Rifle and Rod; or, A Cruise Down the Lake. By J. M. Merrill.
218—Pards; or, Comrades for Life. By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our libraries and cannot procure them from newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Cut out and fill in the following order blank and send it to us with the price of the books you want and we will send them to you by return mail. POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Gentlemen:—Enclosed find.....cents for which please send me:

.....190

.....copies of TIP TOP Nos.....
..... " " NICK CARTER Nos.....
..... " " DIAMOND DICK Nos.....
.....copies of BUFFALO BILL Nos.....
..... " " BRAVE AND BOLD Nos.....
..... " " ROUGH RIDER Nos.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....

THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY FRIDAY **HANDSOME COLORED COVERS**

Never has Burt L. Standish written such interesting tales of the adventures of the Merriwell brothers, Frank and Dick, as are now appearing in this weekly. Mr. Standish has a world-wide circle of friends and he is putting forth his best efforts to amuse and entertain them. Boys, you have no idea of what a grand feast he is preparing for you. Tip Top's stories are going to astonish you. Do not fail to buy this library.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, by the publishers upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

533—Dick Merriwell's Summer Team; or, Baseball in the Blue Hills.
534—Dick Merriwell's Demand; or, The Draw at Madawaska.
535—Dick Merriwell's Stabmate; or, The Boy from Bloomfield.
536—Frank Merriwell's Summer Camp; or, The Athletic-school in the Woods.
537—Frank Merriwell's Proposal; or, Starting the Sport in the League.
538—Frank Merriwell's Spook-hunters; or, The Mysterious Island of Mad Lake.
539—Dick Merriwell's Check; or, The Hot Bunch From Happy Camp.
540—Dick Merriwell's Sacrifice; or, Team Work That Told.
541—Dick Merriwell's Heart; or, Breaking the Hard Luck Streak.
542—Frank Merriwell's New Auto; or, The Lure to Destruction.
543—Frank Merriwell's Pride; or, The Double-Header at Pineville.
544—Frank Merriwell's Young Winners; or, The Stars in the Blue Hills.
545—Dick Merriwell's Lead; or, Bound to Hold First Place.
546—Dick Merriwell's Influence; or, On the Right Road At Last.
547—Dick Merriwell's Top Notch; or, Against Odds. Fate, and Scheming.
548—Frank Merriwell's Kids; or, The World Beaters In New York.
549—Frank Merriwell's Kodakers; or, Hunting Big Game Without Guns.
550—Dick Merriwell, Freshman; or, First Days at Yale.
551—Dick Merriwell's Progress; or, The First Chance on the Field.
552—Dick Merriwell, Half-back; or, Getting into the Game at Last.
553—Dick Merriwell's Resentment; or, In Defense of His Honor.
554—Dick Merriwell Repaid; or, The Heart of Officer Maloney.
555—Dick Merriwell's Staying Power; or, The Great Game at New Haven.
556—Dick Merriwell's "Push"; or, The Victim of the "Flying Mare."
557—Dick Merriwell's Running; or, The Meet at Mechanics' Hall.
558—Dick Merriwell's Joke; or, Fun with the Jumping Frenchman.
559—Dick Merriwell's Seven; or, The Scrub That Made the Regulars "Go Some."
560—Dick Merriwell's Partner; or, The Boy from Texas.
561—Dick Merriwell in the Tank; or, Rushing the Regulars at Water Polo.
562—Frank Merriwell's Captive; or, The Folly of Chester Arlington.
563—Frank Merriwell's Trailing; or, The Flight of a Fool.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication, every three months. Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.